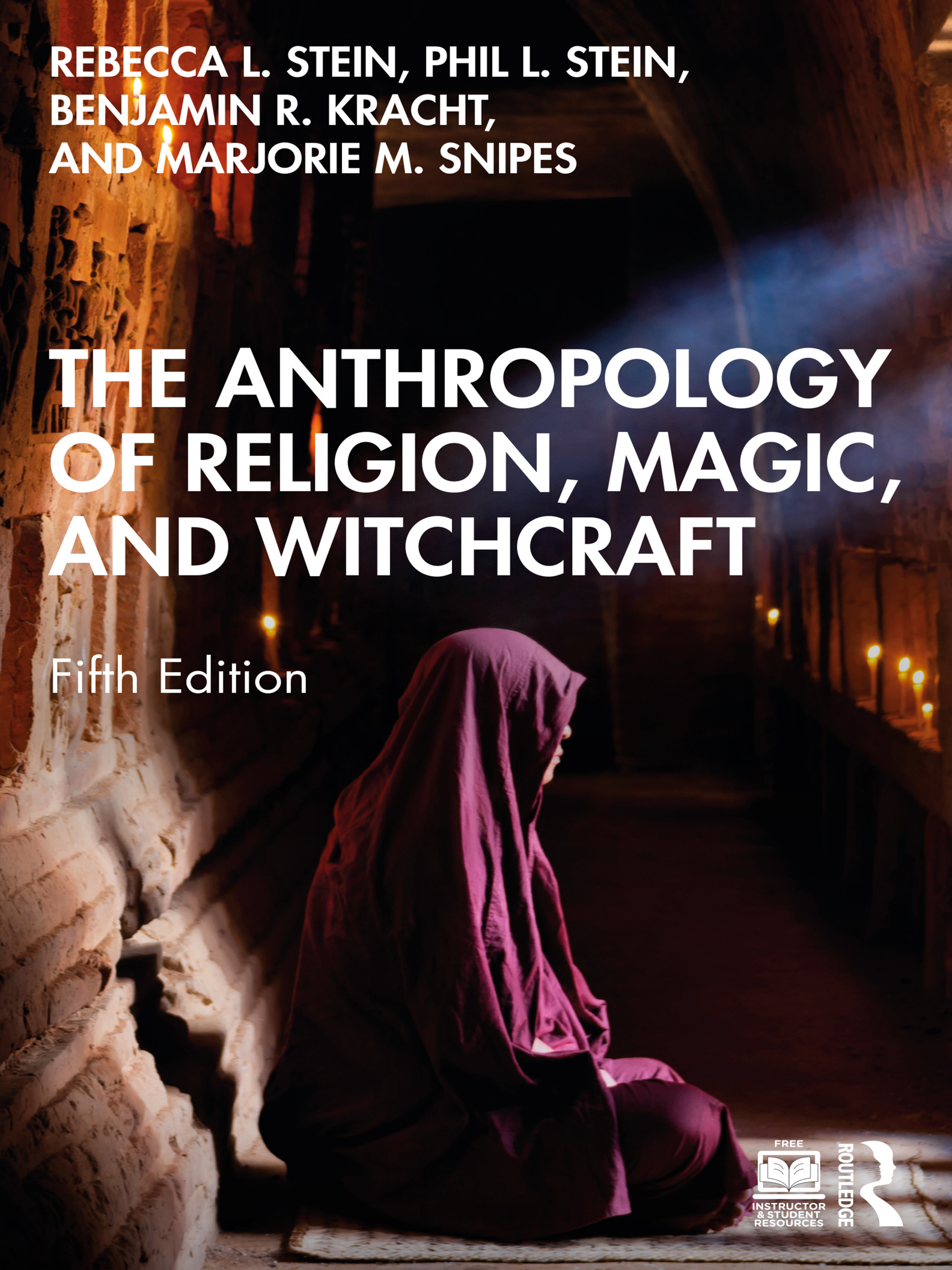
REBECCA L. STEIN, PHIL L. STEIN,
BENJAMIN R. KRACHT,
AND MARJORIE M. SNIPES

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION, MAGIC, AND WITCHCRAFT

Fifth Edition



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This concise and accessible textbook introduces students to the anthropological study of religion. It examines religious expression from a cross-cultural perspective and exposes students to the complexities of religion in small-scale and complex societies. The chapters incorporate key theoretical concepts and a wide range of ethnographic material. The fifth edition of *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft* offers:

- a revised introduction covering the foundations of the anthropology of religion, anthropological methods, and a push toward decolonizing the anthropology of religion,
- expanded coverage of symbols, healing, wizardry, and the intersections of religion with other social institutions,
- new case study material with examples drawn from around the globe, especially from Indigenous communities,
- marginalia in each chapter introducing provocative small-case examples related to the chapter—many of these can be used as prompts for further research, small in-class case studies, or examples for hands-on learning,
- a new chapter on religion and healing, especially useful for Anthropology programs without representation of four fields, as it provides a wider and more interdisciplinary application of the discipline,
- a consistent review of foundations from chapter to chapter, linking material and enabling students to connect what they are learning throughout the course, and
- further resources via a comprehensive companion website, including interactive activities, critical case studies, updated study questions, bibliographical suggestions (including video), and color images.

This is an essential guide for students encountering the anthropology of religion for the first time and also for those with an ongoing interest in this fascinating field.

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Preface

Revising and updating the fifth edition of *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft* has been an important endeavor, given the popularity of undergraduate classes on the anthropology of religion. Anthropology classes often fulfill general education requirements or serve as upper-division electives in the humanities and social sciences at many colleges and universities. Given choices, students often have a deep interest in classes about religion: *Magical Worldview*; *Myth, Magic, and Religion*; *Modern Shamanism*; *American Indian Spirituality*; and *Religion in the Americas* are some of the classes taught by this text's authors. As instructors, we find that students have a special interest in topics such as symbolism, magic, and witchcraft. Because many are not anthropology majors, it is necessary to frame such a textbook with some basic principles of anthropology so that students understand the value of cultural diversity. Chapter 1, therefore, has been revised to highlight the anthropological perspective and the importance of cultural relativism and ethics.

From its beginnings, the discipline of anthropology has focused on the importance of religion. Early scholars, such as Sir Edward Tylor (1832–1917) and Sir James G. Frazer (1854–1941), did *armchair* research on religions, collecting and classifying data on other cultures and belief systems from missionaries, colonials, and government officials. As anthropology matured, becoming more scientific and beginning to address its colonial origins—an ongoing, unfinished process—religion continued to be a major interest within the discipline. Yet, half a century ago, courses in the anthropology of religion were practically non-existent, and there were few affiliated textbooks. The counterculture movement of the 1960s, the rising popularity of the New Age and Wiccan movements, and a renewed interest in Indigenous cultures and spirituality undoubtedly influenced the creation of anthropology classes about religion. Most of the early texts were anthologies composed of previously published articles arranged topically, e.g., myth, ritual, witchcraft, etc. Subsequent editions omitted and added new articles, but the content was most often oriented to upper-division anthropology students. Today, instructors teaching anthropology of religion classes have more options, as there are a handful of available textbooks. So, what features of this textbook make it distinct?

The fifth edition of *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft* includes two new authors who collectively have taught anthropology of religion classes for decades. Moreover, their fieldwork experiences in the Americas add deeper ethnographic saliency

to the topics covered in the text. This edition roughly follows the organization of the fourth edition with some modifications.

New ethnographic examples have been added to enhance the wide geographic distribution of world cultures previously featured, as noted in Table 1.1, "Culture areas of the world." Preserving the balance of cultures presented in the previous edition involved retaining many classic ethnographic studies and augmenting them with case studies from the new authors' research. Highlighting certain key cultures that reappear as examples in topics presented throughout the textbook was retained. These cultures include the Azandes and Yorubas of Africa, Murngins of Australia, Trobriand Islanders of New Guinea, Yanomamös of South America, Mayas of Central America, and the Kiowas and Zunis of North America.

All chapters have been updated, and some expanded. New materials have been added, including anthropological ethics, ritual in the Andes, Maya calendars, Maya and Pawnee human sacrifice, sacred landscapes, ghosts, pilgrimages, monastery life on Mt. Athos, shamanism and neoshamanism, magic, hallucinogens and altered states of consciousness, Plains Indian vision quests, and the emerging group of "spiritual but not religious," among others. Updated information about Wicca and the concept of wizardry appears in Chapter 8, and revised Chapter 12 presents new theories about revitalization movements. Completely new to this edition is Chapter 11 on magic, medicine, and healing, a topic integrally connected to religion.

Other new features are brief chapter case studies and new Boxes (in-depth case studies), including "First fieldwork," "Fieldwork among the Kiowas," "The commodification of Zuni art," "Morning star ceremony," "Why there is evil in the world," "Culturally sensitive healthcare in Dallas," "A haunting in eastern Oklahoma," "Kiowa vision quests," and "The 2023 Asbury revival."

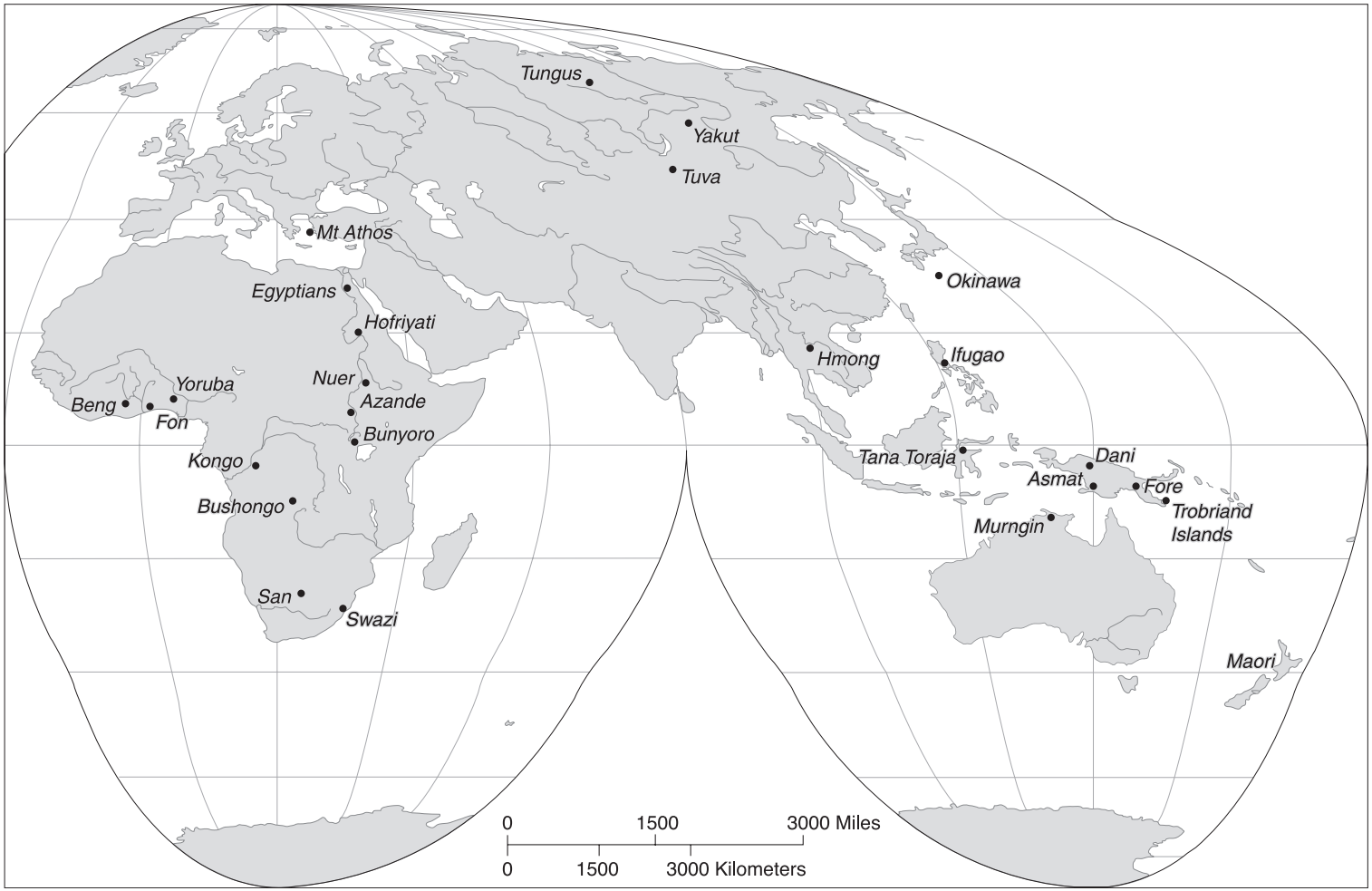
To assist the student in learning the material, we have also updated and expanded the Glossary. Terms that appear in the Glossary are set in bold, and italics are used to emphasize concepts. Each chapter concludes with a summary, study questions, and a link to the updated and expanded companion website where students and instructors can find in-depth case studies, interactive activities, quizzing, and suggested readings, videos, and websites.

Religion crosses all areas of human life—from beliefs, rituals, material culture, and language to physical and psychological well-being. As such, anthropologists say religion is *primus inter pares*—a human institution that stands out among all others. Regardless of a student's major in college or their career choice, understanding more about the diversity of religions and cultures while using the anthropological lens of cultural relativism is an important and valuable skill, especially in our rapidly changing global world. The authors hope students and instructors enjoy this new edition and that it contributes to interest in the anthropology of religion for decades to come.

Acknowledgments

The authors of the fifth edition wish to acknowledge the assistance, collegiality, and support of many people involved in the production of this text: a series of anonymous reviewers whose critiques and suggestions helped to identify areas to be improved, added, and deleted—we appreciate the careful consideration each of these reviewers took to consider this new edition; for photographic assistance, Miranda Daniel (Univ. of West Georgia), Terry Lack (Chichen Itza), and Daisy Njoku (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution); for assistance with artwork throughout the text, Brittney Fisher (New Mexico); for assistance and creative vision on the companion website, Leah Burton and Emily Irvine (Routledge); for their kindness, friendship, and interest in this work, Tito Guerra (New Mexico) and Cecilia Castro Lee (Georgia); and to Meagan Simpson (Routledge), who led us so skillfully from beginning to end—thank you.

Map 1 Map showing the location of societies discussed in the text: Western Hemisphere.



Map 2 Map showing the location of societies discussed in the text: Eastern Hemisphere.

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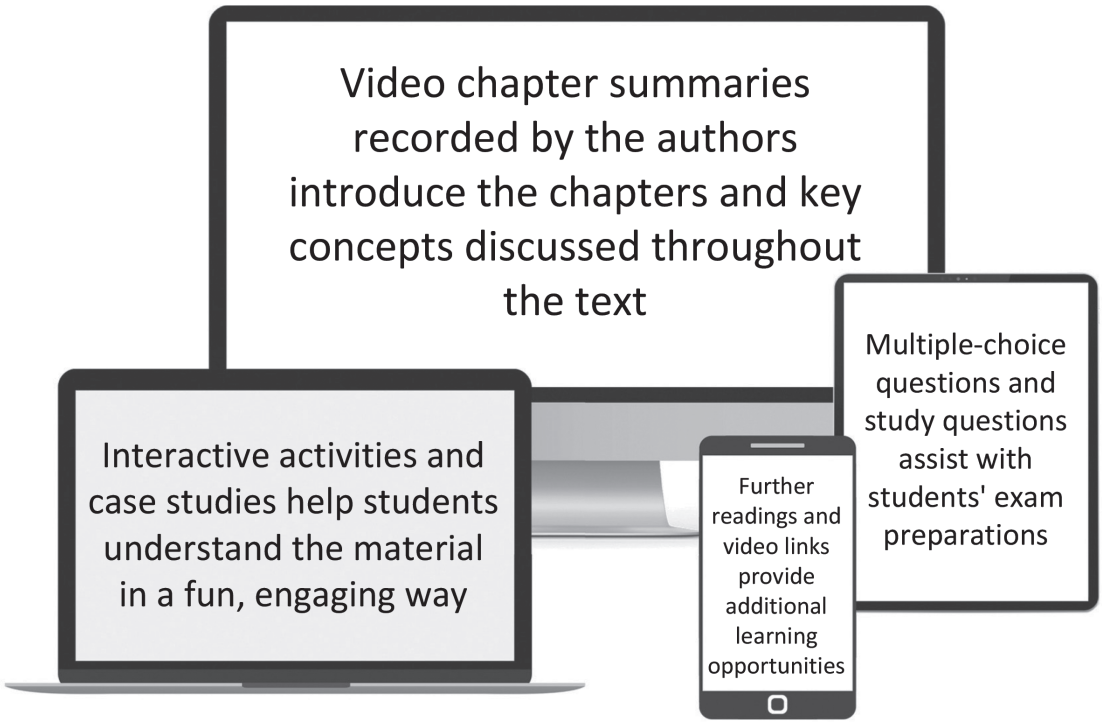
The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft

This concise and accessible textbook introduces students to the anthropological study of religion. It examines religious expression from a cross-cultural perspective and exposes students to the complexities of religion in small-scale and complex societies. The chapters incorporate key theoretical concepts and a wide range of ethnographic material.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Further readings and video links provide additional learning opportunities
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Chapter 1

The anthropological study of religion

Human beings pose questions about nearly everything in the world, including themselves. The most fundamental of these questions are answered by a people's religious beliefs and practices, which are the subject of this book. We will examine the religious lives of a broad range of human communities from an anthropological perspective.

The term *anthropological perspective* means many things. It is a theoretical orientation that compares human societies throughout the world—contemporary and historical, industrial and tribal. Many college courses and textbooks focus on the best-known religions practiced by millions of people and referred to as the "world's great religions"—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, among others. This book will expand the subject to include a focus on lesser-known religious systems, especially those in small-scale, traditional communities. As we do this, we will look for commonalities and learn to appreciate diversity and the adaptive nature of cultures.

This book will not simply describe a series of religious systems. We approach the study of religion by looking at particular topics usually included in the anthropological definition of religion with examples from the anthropological literature and our own and other anthropologists' ethnographic fieldwork.

The anthropological perspective

The subject of this book is religion from an anthropological perspective. What does this mean? The term **anthropology** refers to the study of humanity. However, anthropology shares this subject matter with many other disciplines—sociology, psychology, history, and political science, to name a few. So, how is anthropology different from these other disciplines?

One way in which anthropology differs from other disciplines is that anthropology is an *integrated* study of humanity. Anthropologists study human societies as systematic sums of their parts, as integrated wholes. We call this approach **holism**. For example, many disciplines study marriage, but the anthropologist believes that a full understanding of marriage requires understanding all aspects of the society. Marriage is profoundly influenced by politics and law, economics, ethics, and theology; in turn, marriage influences history, literature, art, and music. The same is true of religious practices and beliefs.

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The concept of culture

Anthropology is the study of human culture. In anthropology, the term **culture** is a technical term. It does not refer to the arts or the "finer things of life." Although the term is widely used and discussed, finding a definition acceptable to all anthropologists can be a difficult task.

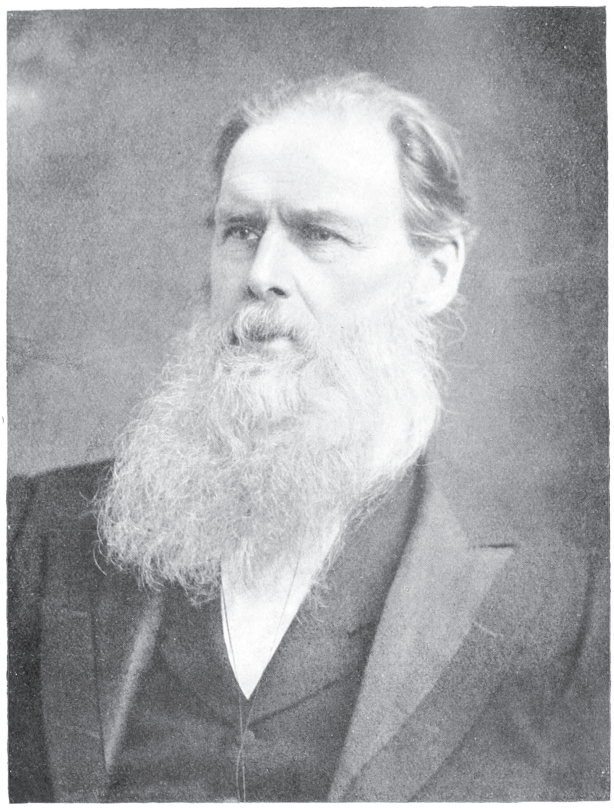

Figure 1.1 British anthropologist E.B. Tylor (1832–1917).

Source: Wiki Commons

British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917) first used the term, culture, in its anthropological sense (Figure 1.1). In 1871, Tylor wrote, "Culture . . . is that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[1] In this definition, Tylor recognized that culture is a "complex whole," which is a reference to the holistic concept, and he noted that culture includes customs that people acquire by growing up in a particular society; that is, culture is *learned*.

When we look at a group of social insects, such as ants, we see a society in which individuals behave in certain stereotypical ways. When we look at a group of humans, we also see certain behaviors that appear to be stereotyped, repetitive, or customary. Yet besides the much greater complexity of human behavior, there are major differences between ant and human behavior. Ant behavior is innate; that is, it is coded in the genes—it is part of the ant's biological heredity. Although some aspects of human behavior are likely to be innate, the preponderance of human behavior is learned, handed down from one generation to the next, and shared by a group of people. Culture is evident in the way people dress, how they greet one another, how they go about their chores, and how they worship their gods. For example, actions that are performed in a traditional ritual are learned from someone else, perhaps a parent or a priest, and they are passed down from one generation to the next.

One of the consequences of the social transmission of culture is that human behavior is complex and variable. Unlike biological inheritance, in which change may occur slowly through the mechanisms of biological evolution, learned behavioral patterns can change very rapidly in response to changing conditions. In addition, the human species, which is quite homogenous biologically, exhibits enormous cultural diversity.

Another important feature of culture is that it is based on the use of *symbols*. **Symbols** are shared understandings about the meaning of certain words, attributes, or objects, such as the color red symbolizing *stop* in traffic signals. The connection between the two is arbitrary; there is no obvious, natural, or necessary connection. For example, in most Western societies,

Figure 1.2 Procession of Señor de los Milagros in Lima, Perú. Celebrated on October 18, "Christ of the Miracles" is believed to protect believers from earthquakes—it is associated with the color purple.

Source: Wiki Commons

black is the color associated with mourning. However, in other cultures, the color associated with mourning may be white, red, or even green. Color identifies many rituals (Figure 1.2).

Culture is learned primarily through symbols. Language is a string of symbols, and we learn, communicate, and even think by using these symbols. Symbols are obviously an important area of discussion for the study of religion. The Christian cross, for example, symbolizes not just the religion itself but a particular philosophy and history. In Chapter 2, we discuss the nature of symbols and their role in religious practice.

Culture is the *blueprint for behavior*. As humans, we are bearers of culture because we are born into social groups and acquire our beliefs and values from birth. We take our cultural beliefs and values with us wherever we go. When we journey away from our homes and communities of origin, we begin to notice that not everyone is like us. On a larger scale, **society** is the configuration of people in a geographic area; however, not all members of society share the same cultural beliefs. More specifically, culture can be identified by four basic concepts or characteristics. Culture is (1) relative, (2) learned, (3) shared, and (4) integrated.

(1) **Culture is relative—**In the study of different societies, anthropologists often observe behaviors that seem strange and sometimes disturbing. We have grown up in a particular society, and the behaviors and ideas of our own society seem to us to be natural and correct. It is also natural to use our own society as the basis for interpreting and judging other societies. This tendency is called **ethnocentrism**. In its mild form, it causes people to stay together in groups with individuals who are "like-minded," leading to cultural diversity; in an extreme form, it can lead to racism and genocide.

Anthropologists realize, however, that a true understanding of other cultures cannot develop through ethnocentric interpretations. Thinking of other people as primitive, superstitious, and immoral only colors our observations and prevents us from reaching any kind of true understanding of human behavior and thought. Anthropologists attempt to remain neutral and to accept the ways of life of other communities as appropriate for those who live in these communities. Anthropologists also attempt to describe and understand people's customs and ideas from an **emic perspective,** the study of a society through the eyes of the people being studied. The goal is to study what people believe, not whether or not what they believe is true. This anthropological approach of **cultural relativism** is one in which we suspend judgment of other people and customs until we have an emic point of view.

Figure 1.3 Yanomamö woman and child. Some Yanomamös use twigs as an adornment to emulate the jaguar, an important spiritual (cultural) symbol.

Source: Wiki Commons

For example, funeral rituals involve a dead body. All societies have ways of handling the corpse in one way or another. Burial is quite common, but there are a number of variables, such as where the grave is located, what the body is buried in, what objects are buried with the body, and so on. Bodies can also be placed in trees to decay, and later, the bones may be cleaned and buried. Bodies can be cremated, and the remains kept in a container, buried, or scattered at sea. Among the Yanomamös of Venezuela and Brazil (Figure 1.3), the cremated remains are ground into a powder, mixed into a plantain stew, and consumed by family members. Other cultural groups, such as the Fores of Papua New Guinea, consume small pieces of the dead body.

The practice of drinking cremated remains or eating human flesh would probably horrify most North Americans. On the other hand, Yanomamös are horrified by the U.S. practice of burial because it leads to the decay of the body in the ground. They believe that the deepest expression of love is for close relatives to provide a final resting place for their loved ones' spirits within their own bodies. Is this practice wrong, immoral, or dangerous? The answer, of course, lies within the cultural practices of the group and how that group defines correct and appropriate behaviors.

Like all humans everywhere, anthropologists must deal with their own reactions and judgments about certain cultural practices, but the goal is to minimize the effects when conducting research. However, cultural relativism sometimes can be controversial and challenging to defend when religious practices of other peoples include such customs as physical alterations of the genitalia, such as female circumcision, or cannibalism.

Cultural relativism is one of the basic concepts necessary to anthropology and it should not be put aside lightly. Our first approach to any cultural practice should be to try to understand it in context, through the emic perspective—to understand the meaning it has for people in that culture. After doing so, however, is it possible to say, "I understand this practice and why this culture does it, but it is still wrong"? The difficulty in this is knowing where to draw the line.

(2) **Culture is learned—**As humans, we begin learning culture from birth through the interplay of **socialization** and **enculturation**. Socialization refers to the formal, deliberate, and direct training a person (usually a child) receives to become a functioning member of their culture. As children, we learn the beliefs and values of our social group; we learn a specific language and proper behavior, such as when to express or suppress emotions. Children are taught how to react to authority figures—parents, teachers, elders—who often direct socialization, a tutelage in which socially acceptable or unacceptable behaviors are rewarded or punished. Because socialization involves efforts to shape and control behavior, conflict often arises between the targets and agents who attempt to control the time and place of certain behaviors, for instance, the feeding behavior of infants. Biology, in fact, is shaped by culture in such diverse practices as toilet training and nutrition.

Enculturation involves everything we learn about the beliefs, practices, and values of our own culture through interactions and observation. Enculturation is primarily indirect, meaning children learn by emulating the behavior of others, as opposed to being deliberately taught. As we develop, for example, we learn to define music versus noise or that foods can be delicious or disgusting. Children, especially, are focused on absorbing the human behavior to which they are exposed. Adults do not always realize the multiple ways they are teaching children. For instance, straw polls used to predict elections suggest that children often mimic the political stances of their parents. Enculturation is subtle yet powerful; up to 70 percent of what we learn is through enculturation.

Much of what we learn involves the interplay of socialization and enculturation. For instance, a child fighting with an older sibling reflects socialization, but the cause of the fight is based on enculturation. Children have learned the value of what they are struggling for; desire and the expression of desire are part of the process. Behaviorally, anthropologists believe that the processes of socialization and enculturation produce similarities and differences between societies. Both involve learning from other people how to behave; the major difference is that, primarily, socialization involves deliberate teaching, whereas enculturation is unintentional.

Cultural relativism and ethics

Many of these ongoing debates and discussions are hosted on the website of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), an international organization of scholars and practitioners of anthropology (see www.americananthro.org/). These are important issues in the study of anthropology.

(3) **Culture is shared—**Though members of a culture share the same blueprint, not everyone adheres to its beliefs and values in the same way, as evidenced by North American Kiowa mourning customs, which have changed over the last century. In the late nineteenth century, men cut their hair short, women cut off fingertips when a close relative died, and the name of the deceased was not spoken again unless it was specifically assigned to another person. In the early twentieth century, in an effort to eradicate these practices, the Kiowa Agency superintendent often sent tribal police to monitor funerals to prevent self-mutilation and giving away property. By then, cutting fell into disuse, though Kiowas maintained mourning customs of not participating in tribal dances or other social activities for up to a year after a family member's death. When the mourning period ended, a medicine man then "smoked" the bereaved person's home with cedar to ward off negative energies. While modern Kiowa living rooms are adorned with family portraits, rectangular patches of brighter paint outline photographs that were removed during the mourning period.

Figure 1.4 The Wichita Mountains in southwestern Oklahoma are a sacred landscape, the spiritual homeland of the Kiowas. Some still go into the mountains to pray.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

Today, even these customs are changing (Figure 1.4). In May 1993, a Kiowa man passed away a week before the Black Leggings Warrior Society ceremonial, a ritual to honor veterans. Walking through the grassy parking area outside the dance arena, the man's mother was observed sitting inside her car. In accordance with mourning customs, she wore old clothing. When approached, she said that older customs dictated that she should not be at the dance, but she reasoned that she could bend the rules a little by listening to the songs from a distance. Shortly afterward, a cousin of the deceased was seen approaching the dance arena, dressed in dance regalia. When asked why he was dancing in spite of custom, he commented, "The old ways are dying out." Then he stated that beforehand, he had his home in Fort Worth, Texas, "smoked" by a medicine man so that he could come to the dance. When the mother of the deceased was told this, she said, "Oh, those urban Indians do whatever they want." Though they share the same beliefs, their behavior demonstrates that not everyone adheres to the same cultural practices.

(4) **Culture is integrated—**According to Gestalt theory, which originated in late nineteenth-century German psychology, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." Applied to culture, one must look at the entire culture instead of analyzing its parts in isolation. Culture is made of integrated parts representing a cultural whole: language, history, politics, subsistence, medicine, art, expressive culture, etc.

Anthropology is a holistic, integrated discipline utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding human behavior. Anthropology borrows from other social and behavioral sciences, such as history, sociology, geography, political science, criminal justice, psychology, economics, and hard sciences, such as geology, genetics, osteology, and biology. As mentioned previously, anthropologists study human societies as systematic sums of their parts, as integrated wholes.

Why can't everyone be like me? Why are we different? Peoples throughout history have pondered these questions. Biology teaches that variation within a species is essential to its evolutionary survival. The same must apply to our species, *Homo sapiens*, for if all cultures were the same, we surely would be extinct. Cultural differences reflect the variations within human groups, as cultures around the world are vastly different from one another and adapted to different social and physical environments. In anthropology, the **cross-cultural approach** allows us to examine beliefs and values in different cultures so we can better understand the similarities and differences that are part of the human condition. Understanding other cultures on their own terms, not ours, is crucial for gaining knowledge about other peoples and religions.

Four fields of anthropology

The holistic nature of anthropology emerges from four subdivisions (specialties) within the discipline. Traditional anthropologists speak of *four-field anthropology*. These fields are biological anthropology, archaeology, linguistic anthropology, and cultural anthropology. Today, with the rapid increase and complexity of anthropological studies, anthropologists are becoming more specialized. The often-simplistic concept of anthropology as being composed of the integrated study of these four fields is rapidly breaking down, but a review of these four fields will acquaint those studying anthropology for the first time with the essential nature of the discipline.

Biological anthropology (also called *physical anthropology*) is the study of human biology and evolution. Biological anthropologists are interested in genetics and genomics; evolutionary theory; the biology and behavior of primates, the group of animals that includes monkeys, apes, and humans; and paleoanthropology, the study of the hominin fossil record.[2] Anthropologists with a biological orientation often discuss the evolutionary origins and the neurobiology of religious experience.

Archaeology is the study of material culture (*artifacts*)—the things humans make and use—with a focus on reconstructing human behavior. Humans have the capacity to take raw materials and convert them into life-sustaining products—implements, tools, inventions, weapons, etc. Like detectives, archaeologists rely on reconstructing the past and present, focusing on human behavior through the study of these material remains. Evidence of religious expression exists in the ruins of ancient temples, the art and writings of people who lived in societies that have faded into history, and in the modern world, such as in the ceremonial use of sacred space by devotees of the Vodou religion.

The field of **linguistic anthropology** is devoted to the study of language, which, according to many anthropologists, is a unique feature of humans. Many religious practices are linguistic in nature, involving the recitation of words, evidenced often in the myths,

literature, and prayers of a religious group or community. Historically, anthropologists have worked in traditional communities, so learning the native language is a doorway into the mindset of other cultures expressed through **Indigenous knowledge**, which includes local conceptions of the universe and everyday wisdom used for survival.

Cultural anthropology is the study of contemporary human societies and makes up the largest area of anthropological inquiry. Cultural anthropologists study people's social organization, economics and technology, political organization, marriage and family life, child-rearing practices, and so forth. The study of religion is a subject within the general field of cultural anthropology; while we will focus on cultural anthropology, we will be drawing on all four subfields in our examination of religion.

The holistic approach

Studying a society holistically is a very daunting task. It requires a great deal of time—time to observe human behavior and time to interview members of a society. Because of the necessity of having to limit the scope of a research project, cultural anthropologists have often been involved in long-term studies of small, remote communities. However, as isolated small communities become increasingly incorporated into larger political units, anthropologists are turning more and more to the study of larger, more complex societies. For example, within an urban setting, anthropologists may study specific companies, hospitals, neighborhoods, gangs, clubs, and churches. Anthropological studies take place over long periods of time and usually require the anthropologist to live within the community and to participate to a degree in the lives of the people they study, while at the same time making objective observations.

Most commonly, anthropology students are introduced to small communities such as **foraging bands**, small **horticultural villages**, and groups of **pastoral nomads**. They become familiar with the lives of the Trobriand Islanders off the coast of New Guinea, for example, the Navajos of the American Southwest, the Yanomamös of northern South America, the Murngins of northern Australia, and the Sans of southern Africa. Some people refer to these societies as being "primitive," but *primitive* is a pejorative term, one laden with negative connotations such as inferior and "less than." A better term is **small-scale**. When we say *small-scale*, we refer to relatively small communities, villages, and bands that practice foraging, herding, or technologically simple horticulture.

We will also examine aspects of what are often referred to as the "world's great religions." Like the term *primitive*, the term *great* involves a value judgment and is not used frequently in anthropology. These familiar religions include Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (Figure 1.5). They are similar in that the origins of these religions are based on the lives of a particular individual or founder, such as Moses, Christ, Mohammad, and the Buddha. These religions have spread into thousands of different societies, and their adherents number in the millions. The small-scale societies and religions that are more traditionally studied by anthropologists, by contrast, are usually not based on the lives of particular prophets or founders, and their adherents might number only a few hundred or a few thousand.

If they involve only a very small number of people, then why study these small-scale religions? Among the many questions anthropologists ask about humanity are the following: Are there **human universals**—characteristics found in all human societies? And

when we look at universals, or at least very widespread features, what are the ranges of variation? Returning to the example of marriage, we could ask the following questions: Is marriage found in all human societies? And what are the various forms that marriage takes? We might ask similar questions about religion. To answer these questions, cultural anthropologists go to a field site, study particular communities, and write reports (called *ethnographies)* describing these communities. Questions of universality and variability can be answered by comparing ethnographic descriptions of hundreds of human societies.

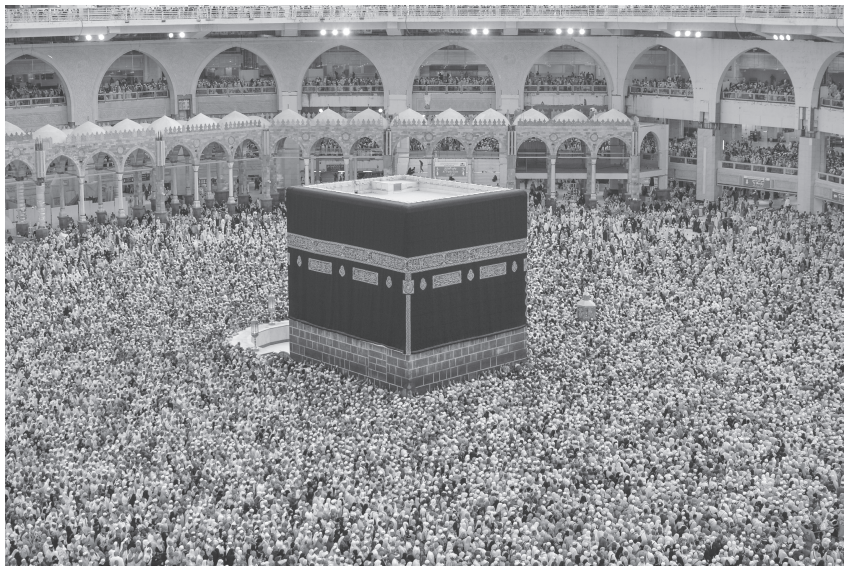

Figure 1.5 Muslims participating in the hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca. The central symbol is the Kaaba at the center, believed to be the house of God.

Source: Wiki Commons

The goal of anthropology is also to study the broad range of human beliefs and behaviors to discover what it means to be human. This is best accomplished by examining religious and other cultural phenomena in a wide variety of cultures of different sizes and structures, including our own. It is often said that the aim of anthropology is "to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange." Only through cross-cultural comparisons is this possible.

The study of human societies

Ethnography, usually associated with cultural anthropology, is the descriptive study of contemporary human societies. Cultural anthropologists who study human societies and write ethnographies are also called *ethnographers*. However, not all descriptions of human societies are written by ethnographers. For example, an archaeologist who studies the physical and cultural remains of societies that existed in the past and are known today only from their ruins, burials, and material remains can, to a limited degree, reconstruct the lives of people who lived in ancient societies. Sometimes, the only descriptions we have of people's lives are those written in diaries and reports by explorers and colonial administrators. Although these descriptions are far from complete and objective, they provide information.

In our text, we will visit some societies known solely from archaeological remains, but most of the examples in this book are from societies that exist today or have existed in the recent past. Many were first visited and described by anthropologists in the early to mid-1900s. Although these societies have changed over time, as all groups do, and although some have passed out of existence, anthropologists speak of them in the **ethnographic present**; that is, we discuss these groups in the present tense as they were first described by the ethnographers

Figure 1.6 American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942)

Source: Wiki Commons

who studied them. Contemporary societies will be discussed whenever possible.

Ethnographic fieldwork

Many of the examples in this book derive from research conducted by cultural anthropologists. Cultural anthropologists usually conduct **fieldwork** by immersing themselves in another culture, a tradition that began in the late nineteenth century, as anthropology became a professional discipline under the guidance of Franz Boas (1858–1942), the father of modern anthropology (Figure 1.6). Boas's students were among the earliest fieldworkers, many of whom conducted the first scientific studies of American Indian communities. In the late 1920s, Margaret Mead was the first student to conduct overseas fieldwork when she went to Samoa to study adolescence. Since then, traditional fieldwork often involves going to another part of the world and living with another culture for at least a year, though anthropologists also work closer to home.

Although many graduate programs in anthropology offer ethnographic field methods classes, we're usually on our own when conducting fieldwork. The old adage, "you learn fieldwork by doing fieldwork," is a tradition that has not changed very much over the years, as noted by Barbara Anderson (Box 1.1).[3]

Box 1.1 First fieldwork

For graduate students in the late fifties, there was no way, absolutely no way, of becoming a real anthropologist without foreign fieldwork, a hallowed rite of passage. Formal training in fieldwork was rare. Some degree of insight was provided by our professors in lectures, but the message conveyed was that the stuff of fieldwork was essentially incommunicable. Over the months and years of graduate work, we were informed that you learned fieldwork by doing fieldwork. You learned by a process of immersion—marination is a better word—in jungles, swamps, and arctic floes. The fact that our professors were only sporadically articulate about their field ordeals contributed to the sense of mystery with which fieldwork was endowed.

Fieldwork was presented as a difficult, demanding business. In one year—as nearly as we could reconstruct it—our Peoples of Africa professor learned two unwritten

languages, built his own hut, and maintained an uneasy peace between two warlike tribes, all the while gathering data on a village whose kinship structure was unparalleled in anthropological reporting.

Fieldwork loomed as an undertaking only a little less challenging than a self-performed appendectomy, a feat that one anthropologist—goaded, I suspect, beyond endurance by the one-upmanship of a colleague—said he had performed on himself in an Amazonian village. The fact that he performed it badly and was rushed by bearers through the jungle to a down-river hospital absolved him from self-glorification.

Sites for fieldwork ideally were desolate, snake-infested, malaria-ridden communities a hundred miles (minimally) from the nearest vestige of civilization. Our professors spoke with awesome familiarity about their villages, their mud-and-dung huts, their people, and their diseases.

Part of the mystique lay in the continuing implication that the skills critical to successful fieldwork anywhere in the world were essentially unimpartible. One could do fieldwork, or one could not. "The field," as it was patronizingly referred to by those who had survived its challenges, separated the men from the boys, the sheep from the goats, the grain from the chaff. Like acne to the teenager, the dismay that pervaded a student's every pore on the eve of first fieldwork was viewed as an inevitable phase of their professional rite of passage. As graduate students, we longed for the day when we would have our people, our huts, our villages, and our diseases: we wanted to be real anthropologists, too.[4]

Little has changed since Dr. Anderson's graduate school days in the 1950s. Today, we still learn fieldwork by doing fieldwork, though there are some basic principles in ethnographic fieldwork that are important for students to learn (1) rapport, (2) key informants (collaborators), (3) culture shock, (4) cultural brokerage, and (5) anthropological ethics:

1. **Rapport—**Successful fieldwork is dependent on establishing friendship and trust with members of the host community. Acceptance is imperative.
2. **Key informants** (collaborators)—The fieldworker will likely establish long-term relationships with specific individuals or families who serve as liaisons or cultural brokers with the wider community. These are the individuals with whom we interact most closely, often crosschecking information we gather from interviews with other community members.
3. **Culture shock—**It is common for anthropological fieldworkers to initially experience anxiety when interacting with members of other cultures who live in unfamiliar places, eat different foods, practice different rituals, etc. Success in the field involves adapting to new circumstances. (Another phenomenon is *reverse culture shock*, which can happen after the fieldworker returns home and views his or her culture differently.)
4. **Cultural brokerage—**As anthropologists, we still carry our own culture with us at all times. We are not researching others in order to become members of other cultures,

although many of us establish *fictive kinship* ties with members of the host community when they "adopt" us. As cultural brokers, we work to research and communicate across cultural barriers, in a sense *translating* the culture we are studying into a scientific form/common language to be understood by others. We remain somewhat neutral participants in the cultures we study by using an **etic perspective**, the scientific point of view. The ethical code of anthropology allows anthropologists to become advocates for the people they study if the anthropologist chooses, but this is not the same as relinquishing the scientific perspective.

5. **Anthropological ethics**—Although anthropologists endeavor to establish lasting relationships with community members, there are certain boundaries that can never be crossed, for instance, sexual relationships or engaging in harmful or illegal activities. Seeking informed consent and protecting the integrity of our collaborators is critical, and it can be unethical to reveal esoteric information related to sacred beliefs and rituals. Today, any anthropologist teaching at a federally funded institution is required to submit a research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before fieldwork is approved, regardless of where they conduct their research. The IRB is a federal ethics review process for all researchers in any discipline and is meant to determine that the researcher has taken all precautions to protect the human subjects involved.[5]

Anthropology and ethics

The discipline of anthropology has a code of ethics referred to as the Principles of Professional Responsibilities. It involves specific measures each anthropologist should take to ensure the dignity and respect of all persons: do no harm, be open and honest regarding your work, obtain informed consent and other necessary permissions, weigh competing ethical obligations due collaborators and other affected parties, make your results accessible, protect and preserve your records, and maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships. For more on anthropological ethics, see www.americananthro.org/LearnAndTeach/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=22869

Ethnography involves two primary field methods (ways of gathering social and behavioral data): interviews and **participant observation**. Logistically, it is best to stay in or close to the communities where we work for daily access to key informants or collaborators. Ethnographers collecting field data have various interviewing techniques, such as the *open-ended, unstructured interview* that begins with a few basic questions. As the key informant provides answers, more specific questions can be asked. Participant observation involves spending time in one's field site on a constant basis, interacting with people, and observing their behavior (as we are being observed, in turn). There are ethical limitations, however, because we cannot go everywhere, nor should we engage in all activities. By spending time in other cultures, we learn our boundaries, mostly through the implicit and tacit rules of the culture. We also learn the non-verbal clues of the culture. Anthropologists working in field settings mostly learn about the customs from experience, as people do not necessarily tell us their cultural rules directly.

The Fores of New Guinea: an ethnographic example

In the preceding sections of this chapter, we learned some basic concepts of anthropology. Now, let us turn our attention to a particular example to illustrate these ideas.

The holistic approach sees human behavior as a complex set of interacting behaviors and ideas. In examining a society, we might begin with a particular problem that interests us, but we soon realize that to understand this problem fully, we have to look at many other aspects of the society.

An example of this is the study of the Fores, a group of about 20,000 horticulturalists living in the eastern highlands of Papua New Guinea. The problem that brought the Fores to the attention of the Western world was a medical one. The solution to the problem brought the Nobel Prize in Medicine to one of the investigators.

When the Australian government first contacted the Fores in the 1950s, a significant number of individuals were suffering from a strange illness, and about 200 were dying of this annually, primarily women and children. This was having a major impact on the population.

The illness is characterized by a variety of symptoms, but the most obvious ones are jerking movements and shaking, which make voluntary motor activity difficult. The course of the illness lasts about nine months. In the end, the victim can no longer stand or sit up and can no longer eat or drink water and soon dies. The Fores call this illness *kuru*, which means "to tremble with fear" in the Fore language.

The medical team sent to help with the disease sought the cause. Because it appeared to be largely confined to the Fores, the team thought it might be genetic or due to a toxin in the environment. However, *kuru* was ultimately determined to be the result of an infectious agent called a *prion*. But how was the *kuru* prion passed from one person to another? Was it passed on through contaminated water, air, or sexual activity? The answer anthropologists found was in a traditional religious ritual: cannibalism.

It was the Fores custom to eat some of the deceased's body as part of the funeral rituals. The body of the deceased was carried to an abandoned field, where kin dismembered and cooked it. Close relatives then consumed some of the flesh. Because cooking does not destroy the prions, they entered the bloodstream through cuts and open sores and eventually settled in the brain, where, many years later, the person who consumed this flesh began to show symptoms of the disease. Because women and children traditionally ate the deceased's brain, where prions are primarily found, they were the most likely to develop the disease.

The modern medical community now had an explanation for what caused the disease and knew how it was transmitted from one individual to another. The government had a "cure" to the epidemic: eliminate the practice of cannibalism. As a result, cannibalism stopped, and *kuru* eventually disappeared, although this took some time because of the long incubation period of the disease. However, the Fores themselves did not understand this explanation and stopped eating the bodies of their dead only because not doing so would mean spending time in jail. The Fores did not accept the scientific explanation of the disease. Think about how difficult it would be for the doctors to convince the Fores that *kuru* was caused by tiny prions that no one could see.

Fores had an emic explanation for *kuru*. It was the result of sorcery. Sorcery is a form of magic, which we will discuss in Chapter 10. The sorcerer, the person who practices sorcery, would steal something that was once a part of or in contact with the victim, such as a piece of clothing or a lock of hair. The material was made into a bundle with some leaves, bark, and stones bound up into a package. After reciting a spell, the sorcerer would place the bundle into muddy ground, and as the bundle rotted, the victim would develop the symptoms of the disease. This belief influenced everyday behavior, as individuals were careful to hide things that could be retrieved and used by a sorcerer.

In spite of this caution, people still developed *kuru*. In this case, a divination ritual was used to reveal the identity of the sorcerer causing the illness. As we will see in Chapter 7, many people use such techniques to reveal things that are difficult or impossible to discover by other means. Once the sorcerer was identified, the Fores had many options to counter the activity of the evildoer. A person with *kuru* might also have consulted a healer.

The fact that *kuru* primarily struck women had significant social consequences. Many men lost wives through *kuru*, and the shortage of women meant that many men were unable to find wives. In addition, men with children who had lost their wives had to perform many domestic chores normally reserved for women, including farming.

The ethnography of the Fores and the description of *kuru* illustrate the concept of holism. From the Western point of view, we begin with a medical problem: a disease. Then, we see how this fatal disease affects various aspects of the society because of the death of women of childbearing age. This includes marriage, the family, the raising of children, farming, and so forth. Also, we see how the society attempts to explain and deal with the disease through religion. A description of *kuru* among the Fores as only a medical problem fails to provide us with a complete understanding of that disease.

Two ways of viewing culture

What causes *kuru* among the Fores? From our viewpoint, a complete answer to that question includes both biological factors (the disease-causing organism) and cultural factors (the practice of cannibalism). However, the Fores themselves would give another answer to this question: *Kuru* is caused by sorcery. A holistic approach must consider both emic and etic perspectives.

An anthropologist—or any scholar, for that matter—cannot be completely neutral and objective when describing a culture. Observation, recording, and analysis involve processing data in one's mind. One's own cultural background, education, training, and other factors will act as a filter or lens that colors what are thought of as objective observations. Using a biomedical model, physicians searched for the cause of *kuru* through techniques learned in medical school based on the scientific method. Although the physicians were able to discover the biological cause of *kuru*, the disease-causing prion protein, they were unable to discover the mode of transmission. Medical science identified a series of transmission pathways, and none of them offered a valid explanation. Anthropologists viewed the situation from a holistic, anthropological viewpoint to make the connection between *kuru* and cannibalism.

The physician and the anthropologist are outsiders looking in. They see Fore culture in terms of Western philosophy and theory. There are advantages to an etic perspective. Just as a friend or therapist might see patterns in a person's life that the person might overlook, an anthropologist might see patterns of behaviors or beliefs in a culture that the members of that group may not recognize. Another advantage is that anthropologists can apply a consistent form of analysis to many different societies being studied, permitting them to make comparisons between societies and discover some universal principles about human behavior.

Yet the Fores see their world from an altogether different perspective, using linguistic categories and basic assumptions that differ profoundly from ours. To the Fores, sorcery is the ultimate cause of *kuru*, which makes sense in their culture. Theirs is an emic perspective.

Understanding the differences between these two perspectives is a key component of ethnographic research. People in other cultures use linguistic/cognitive categories and basic assumptions about their world that differ profoundly from ours; key informants and collaborators express worldviews in terms that are meaningful to them. Anthropologists documenting the emic perspective study a society through the eyes of the people being studied. Significantly, members of a society are not necessarily like-minded, so there is emic variation within a group, as we saw in the previous Kiowa example. The ethnographer, therefore, should work with more than one or two people, seeking the "multiplicity of voices" that describe a cultural system.

Emic and etic data should not be seen as mutually exclusive or right or wrong. There should be a balance of emic/etic viewpoints in ethnographic reporting. Importantly, each voice speaks for itself; it is important to know who said what and when (Box 1.2).

Box 1.2 Fieldwork among the Kiowas

In late April 1987, anthropologist Benjamin R. Kracht spent an afternoon visiting Kiowa minister John Tsatoke in his home south of Carnegie, Oklahoma. Tsatoke's grandfather was the famed army scout Hunting Horse. Likewise, Tsatoke served in the military and reminisced about soldiering for the 689th Field Artillery Battalion, Twentieth Corps, during World War II. He shared stories about liberating the Dachau concentration camp near Munich and a Polish prison near Frankfort, Germany. Because his cousin was stationed in another outfit, they served as code talkers who communicated classified information over walkie-talkies in Kiowa, which prompted the eavesdropping Germans to swear over the open airwaves because they could not understand what they were saying.

Tsatoke pledged on the battlefield that if he returned alive to southwestern Oklahoma, he would become a Christian and work for the church. When Kracht met him in 1987, he had served in the ministry for three decades and was the pastor of Cache

Creek United Methodist Indian Church, approximately ten miles south and east of Carnegie.

While visiting, Kracht had an uncanny feeling he had seen Rev. Tsatoke somewhere before but could not remember exactly when and where. Towards the end of the visit, Tsatoke conveyed the difficulties of being a minister, always within the purview of the public. Understandably, Tsatoke's generation was mostly raised by hardline Christian converts who had been taught by missionaries that Indigenous practices like War Dancing were improper. By the late 1950s, however, the rising popularity of powwows in western Oklahoma led many converts to realize there was nothing wrong with dancing. However, a few Kiowas still believe that War Dancing at powwows conflicts with Christian beliefs.

In this light, Rev. Tsatoke proclaimed, "As a pastor, attending a powwow would be like going into a bar for a drink." In other words, he would be looked upon unfavorably if seen at a dance. About that time, Kracht remembered when and where he had seen Tsatoke—four years previously at a Kiowa Black Leggings Warrior Society ceremonial, where he said the prayer before the evening meal. Reminded of that, Tsatoke replied, "Oh yes, I was there because a relative was being honored, but I left after the meal."

Years later, a Kiowa friend said that Rev. Tsatoke was chaplain of the Black Leggings and *always* attended the ceremonies. So, was Rev. Tsatoke lying? Not really; he was presenting an emic perspective, his "ideal" of how things are. People mostly present themselves and their culture positively; they describe the rules of how things should be. Human behavior, however, does not always follow the rules.

Viewing the world

The idea of culture involves much more than simply describing human activity. People also have different belief systems, perceptions, and understandings of their world and their lives. Culture gives meaning to reality. We live in a real, physical world translated through the human mind. We look out of a window and see a mountain rising above us—to the geologist, the mountain is a structure made of rock formed through natural processes; to the hydrologist concerned with bringing water to a desert town, the mountain is the place where there are snowfields; to the biologist, it is the home of many plants and animals, some of them perhaps endangered.

To many people, however, a mountain is much more. The mountain might be the home of their gods (Figure 1.7) or the place where the souls of the dead congregate after death. Mountains figure prominently in many Biblical stories. For example, Mount Sinai was where Moses received the Ten Commandments, and Mount Ararat was where Noah's ark came to rest. Other sacred mountains include Mount Olympus, where the gods of ancient Greece lived, and the four sacred mountains of the Navajo world. We may label this as part of the imagination of a people, yet to the people who hold these beliefs, the sacredness of a mountaintop may be as real as the presence of rocks, snow, or plants.

Theoretical approaches to the study of religion

Most anthropologists believe that the evolution of religious belief systems paralleled the emergence of humankind and that religion is a cross-cultural universal. Others observe that skeptics exist in all cultures and that some individuals perceive the world naturalistically as opposed to spiritually. The earliest known Western treatises on religion appeared two millennia ago in the writings of Greek philosophers like Plato, who wrote, "All mankind, Greeks and non-Greeks alike, believe in the existence of gods." Interestingly, according to Brian Morris, Greek thought is the "fountainhead of the Western intellectual tradition"[6] from which the scientific approach emerges.

Figure. 1.7 Mt. Olympus, Greece. In Greek mythology, Mt. Olympus is the home of the gods and the throne of Zeus.

Source: Wiki Commons

Evolutionary approaches to religion

After the onset of the Darwinian era (post-1859), scholars misapplied Darwin's concept of biological evolution—the mutability of species—to the human condition. The **evolutionary approach** centered on the questions of when and how religion began, a viewpoint founded on the concepts of science, logic, and monotheism as the pinnacles of human achievement. Scholars of the time emphasized *empiricism*, the observation and measurement of phenomena, saying that the only real knowledge is scientific knowledge; any knowledge beyond that is impossible.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of the concept of a general evolution of culture. It was thought that religion naturally evolved from simple to complex and that this evolution was a natural consequence of human nature. An interest in the religion of "primitive" peoples arose from the supposition that "primitive" peoples represented an early stage of cultural evolution and that one could learn about and understand the historical roots of the religion of "civilized" societies by studying living less complex societies.

Anthropologist Sir Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917) used this approach in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871),[7] concluding that all religions had a belief in spiritual beings. Whereas the religions of "civilized" peoples included beliefs in gods and souls, those of "primitive" peoples focused on the belief in spirits and ghosts. He termed this early belief system **animism**.

Tylor thought that the belief in spirit beings and souls was the natural and universal conclusion reached by all peoples through the observation of sleep and dreams, possession,

and death, during which the soul is believed to leave the body, temporarily or permanently. Because other animals are also living, they are believed to have souls that leave the body when the animal dies. In animism, all living things are animated by souls, as are non-living things such as waterfalls and mountains.

Attempting to find commonalities across religious systems, Tylor failed to discover the great variability and diversity within the world's religious systems. In part, this was because Tylor did not go into the field to become immersed in the complexity of a particular culture. Instead, as an *armchair researcher*, he relied on reports of explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators who described, often in simplistic and biased ways, the peoples they encountered in their travels.

British ethnologist Robert R. Marett (1866–1943) developed the concept of a simpler, more basic, and more ancient supernatural force that he called **animatism**.[8] Marett thought that animatism simply grew out of human emotional reaction to the impersonal power of nature. However, Marett overlooked its social and relational aspects. This belief in a supernatural power has been well-studied in the religions of Polynesia and Melanesia, where it is referred to as *mana*. In Chapter 7, we will discuss the ideas of another scholar from the evolutionary school, Sir James G. Frazer (1854–1941), who wrote extensively about magic, a category he considered separate from religion. Frazer saw a natural progression in cultures from magic to religion to science.[9] Like Tylor, Frazer relied on information gleaned from questionnaires sent to missionaries and government officials. In his seminal book, *The Golden Bough* (1911–1915), he used the *comparative method* to identify the beliefs and practices of different societies.

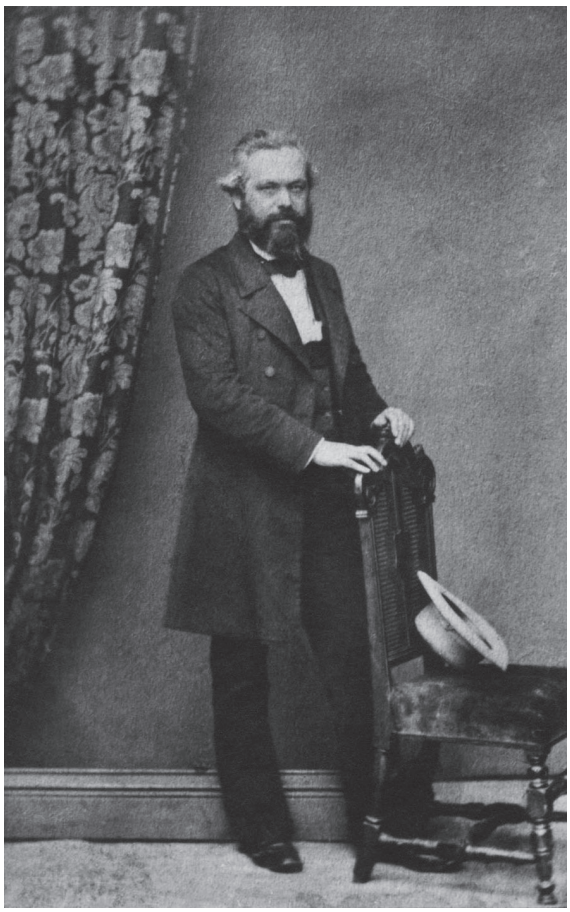

Figure 1.8 German philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883).

Source: Wiki Commons

The evolutionary approach has many critics, and many of the ideas are ethnocentric—for example, Tylor's idea that the religion of "primitive" peoples focuses on spirits and ghosts, while more "civilized" peoples focus on gods. In addition, any ideas about the origin of a cultural practice are, of course, highly speculative. Although the idea of cultural progression with Western societies being more evolved than smaller-scale traditional ones is no longer used in anthropology, the general question of the origins of religion has remained a concern.

Today, many contemporary anthropologists use a modified (neo)-evolutionary approach. After all, the history of human society has witnessed progressive changes through time from foraging to horticultural to agricultural and, finally, industrial and post-industrial societies.

Scholars look for correlations between these changes and various other aspects of a society, including the religious system. For example, foraging societies are often characterized by shamanic practices with part-time religious practitioners, while state societies usually have full-time religious specialists who may be members of a highly organized priesthood.

The Marxist approach

Another influential theorist of the 1800s was Karl Marx (1818–1883) (Figure 1.8). Like many of this era, Marx was critical of religion. However, Marx did not criticize the logic of religion as others had done. He felt that religion reflected society, so any criticism of religion must, therefore, also be a criticism of society. Indeed, the **Marxist approach** sees religion as a human construction, more specifically, a construction by those in power. Marx felt that religion did not reflect the true consciousness of people but a false consciousness designed to divert people's attention from the miseries of their daily lives. This misery was seen as the result of exploitation of the masses by those in power under the capitalist system. Of course, religion existed before capitalism. Marx's basic view is that religion is a natural consequence of the human experience of distress. Critics of Marx point out that there usually is no single, dominant ideology in a society; instead, there are different ideologies that correspond to different subcultures and different classes.

The functional approach

In contrast to the evolutionary and Marxist schools, the **functional approach** asks: What does religion do? What role do religions play in a society? For example, a religion might enforce social cohesion by bringing members together for rituals to provide a foundation for shared beliefs and might also function on the individual level to relieve individual fears and anxiety by providing explanations and meaning.

French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) saw society as problematic.[10] Although sanctions exist to keep people in line, Durkheim thought that these were not enough and that the key lies in the **collective conscious**, a system of beliefs that act to contain the natural selfishness of individuals and promote social cooperation. Collective representations, or symbols, reflect the collective conscious, and during rituals, these collective representations are displayed and reinforced, resulting in a reattachment to the value system of the group.

Both Durkheim and British anthropologist Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1951) saw society as an organism in which the parts act to maintain the whole.[11] Specifically, Radcliffe-Brown focused on the study of social institutions as parts of society, noting that those institutions of greatest social value were believed to possess supernatural power. He believed that rituals function to express the basic sentiments of a society and these ideas are passed down from generation to generation. Radcliffe-Brown saw religion, in general, as an integrative force in society.

Another important theorist in the functional school, Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), had a different approach. Malinowski looked at religion and other features of a society in terms of their purpose in meeting basic human needs. For example, in his analysis of magic, Malinowski stressed that magic is a logical system that people turn to in times of uncertainty or emotional stress. Magic functions to provide control and certainty in an otherwise uncertain world and meets a basic human need (Figure 1.9).

Figure 1.9 Polish-British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942).

Source: Wiki Commons

Specific aspects of the functional approach are still used today and will be referred to in future chapters. Researchers have recognized many phenomena that contribute to the health and maintenance of the society or the individuals in that group. In general, religious phenomena function to provide answers and explanations and to provide a course of action.

The functional school is not without its critics. Some see functionalism as committing the error of *reification* (treating something abstract as if it were concrete and alive). Can we really talk about social institutions serving needs and purposes in the same way that humans do? Functionalism is also seen by some as being tautological (a circular argument) because it argues that we know that something must be functional because it exists; it exists because it is functional. Does every institution and cultural practice have a function? Historians of religion argue that analyzing religion in terms of functionality implies that religion is purely illusory, a tool existing only to fulfill those functions.

Others argue that while the functional approach is useful, more care needs to be taken in terms of which possible functions are logically valid. For example, anthropologist Melford Spiro states that when arguing that a certain function is the cause of a religious behavior, it is necessary for individuals in the society to recognize consciously and seek to satisfy that functional requirement. He argues that an unintended functional consequence (recognized only by the etic perspective) would not count as valid.

The interpretive approach

Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) was an American anthropologist who popularized the metaphor that culture is a meaningful text to be read.[12] Part of his inspiration for this **interpretive approach** was the work of the sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) and his concept of *verstehen* (i.e., understanding the other's point of view).[13] This Weberian approach was opposed to the more popular functionalist approach of the time. Geertz emphasized that the task of anthropologists was not to discover laws or study origins and causes but instead to make sense of cultural systems by studying meaning. Anthropologists need to seek to interpret the culturally specific "webs of significance" that people both create and are caught up in. Interpretive anthropology can reveal these webs of meaning through detailed ethnographic descriptions.

Religion, specifically, comprises a cluster of symbols that together communicate a culture's ideas, values, and way of life. The set of symbols provides ways to interpret the world. Geertz described symbols as playing a double role. They are both "models of" and "models for" in that they both represent the way things are while also directing human

activity. Geertz argued that religious symbols establish very powerful moods and feelings and help explain human existence by giving it an ultimate meaning. These symbols claim to connect humans to a reality that, in some ways, is "more real" than everyday life, thus giving religion a special status above and beyond daily life.

Geertz felt that the study of religion needed to take place in two stages. The first stage is an analysis of the systems of meaning embodied within the religious symbols. The second stage involves relating these systems to social structures and psychological processes. Critics point out that, in reality, he devoted much more time to the first stage than to the second.

The psychosocial approach

The **psychosocial approach** to the study of religion is concerned with the relationship between culture and personality and the connection between society and the individual. One example is the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939).[14] Freud's model of the mind and his concept of defense mechanisms have been used both by Freud himself and by his followers to explain religious phenomena. For example, defense mechanisms are psychological maneuvers by which we distort reality in ways that help us avoid conflict and reduce anxiety. The most important of these for our discussion is *projection*, in which the subject is transposed, and the emotion is projected. So, "I don't like X" becomes "You don't like X." Psychosocial anthropologists believe that individual emotions also get projected at the cultural level. However, correlation does not equal causation, and this and several other issues challenge the correlational approach.

The bio-cognitive approach to religious behavior

What we perceive and think of as our reality is actually a creation of our brain. Studying religion from this perspective is a **bio-cognitive approach**. Our awareness of what is "out there" is based on input from a series of receptors such as our eyes, nose, and tongue. The stimuli picked up by these receptors enter the brain, where they undergo processing before they enter our consciousness. Not all of the information that enters our brains from the outside enters our consciousness.

Brain scans comparing brains at rest with brains of individuals in deep meditation show distinct regions that are active during particular mental activities. In the meditating brain, we see increased activity in the frontal lobe, indicative of increased concentration, and decreased activity in the parietal lobe. This latter area is in the region associated with people's orientation of their bodies in time and space. Changes in activity in this area may be related to the development of out-of-body experiences or a sense of blurring of the boundaries between self and other.

Some theorists have focused on the nature of human **cognition** as an explanation for the origin of religious beliefs and experiences, a general term for processes of the human brain that include perception, learning, memory, concept formation, and problem-solving. Religion is seen not as existing to serve a purpose but rather as an accidental by-product of the way the human brain works.

Despite what psychologists know about how the brain works, for example, we intuitively feel that we merely occupy our bodies, not that we actually are our bodies. This

provides the foundation for a belief in both bodies without souls and souls without bodies. The soul without the body is often believed to survive and have another separate existence after death. A further extension of souls without bodies would also include other supernatural beings, such as gods.

Another way cognition feeds into the evolution of religion is the human tendency to overextend our system of social understanding and infer purpose, goals, intention, and design even where there is none. We attribute human characteristics to an amazing range of inanimate objects, such as, for example, the computer that seems to break down purposely at the most crucial moment. Humans seek and find patterns in random ways and experience *paranormal* phenomena—what looks like a face in a stucco ceiling or a spectral appearance. Anthropologist Pascal Boyer points out that supernatural concepts are extensions of everyday cognitive categories and the way that the human brain processes information. As he writes, "People do not invent gods and spirits; they receive information that leads them to build such concepts."[15]

Postmodernism

Beginning with the Renaissance, scholars based their knowledge on the ideals of rationality, objectivity, and reason. Science was seen as the means for the discovery of knowledge, truth, and progress. This way of approaching an understanding of the world is termed **modernity**. At the time, scholars believed that it was possible to gain a true understanding of all peoples and all societies using standard formal principles of modernity.

In the 1980s, however, the **postmodern** movement, originating earlier in art and architecture, began to affect anthropology and other social sciences. In stark contrast to the ideas of modernity, postmodernism denies the existence of a single formal truth in any society. All knowledge is seen as a human construct that we must try to "deconstruct" in order to understand it. The postmodern movement emphasizes the limitations of science, values *reflexivity* (the awareness that the anthropologist's presence affects the nature of the data collected in the field), and argues that there are multiple viewpoints and truths (called *multivocality*). In contrast to modernity's emphasis on order, postmodernism sees contradictions and instabilities as being inherent in any social group or practice.

The value of postmodernism for anthropology has been to reinforce the idea of multiple ways of seeing the world—that there is no one right way to think or to do things. This is an extension of the concept of cultural relativism. Postmodernism serves as a reminder of how the ethnographer can influence the fieldwork situation. As a result, ethnographers are more self-conscious and more aware of their own positions and biases. Every person sees the world through the lens of their own culture. We cannot remove the lens, but we can become more aware of it.

However, taken to an extreme, postmodernism argues that it is impossible for a person from one culture to ever understand fully someone from another culture. As an extreme theoretical position, it asks if anthropology as a discipline is even possible. As anthropological theories now move into a *post*-postmodern period, most anthropologists have taken a middle-ground approach, appreciating the lessons of postmodernism while attempting to avoid this extreme point of view.

Attempts at defining religion

The beginning point of any study is to define the object of study—in this instance, religion. Yet the task of defining this term is a challenging one indeed. We must avoid using a definition that is too narrow or too vague. Many definitions proposed apply only to some cultures and only to some of the phenomena that anthropologists traditionally place within the domain of religion. Such definitions are often ethnocentric, including only those ideas considered "religious" in one particular culture. In such definitions, topics such as magic and witchcraft may be excluded. On the other hand, a definition that is too inclusive and vague loses much of its meaning and usefulness.

In spite of the difficulties of defining religion, anthropology is a social science, and the methodology of science requires that we define our terms. We need to use an **operational definition**, one in which we define our terms so that they are observable and measurable and, therefore, can be studied. So, what would a good operational definition of religion be? We can start by looking at the various ways scholars have attempted to define the term.

Many definitions of religion share elements that we included in our definition of culture:

Analytic definitions focus on the way religion manifests itself or is expressed in a culture. An example would be defining religions by stating that religious practices generally include rituals. British religious studies scholar Ninian Smart, for example, argued that there were the six *dimensions of religion*.[16] These include an institutional dimension (organization and leadership), a narrative dimension (myths, creation stories, worldview), a ritual dimension (rites of passage and other important ritual activities), a social dimension (religion being a group activity that binds people together), an ethical dimension (customs, moral rules), and an experiential dimension (religion involving experiences of a sacred reality that is beyond ordinary experience).

Analytic definitions are valuable for identifying components within a religious system, but they can also keep us from noticing unique aspects of a religion, certain rituals, or "dimensions" that may not be included in the original list of parts. It is important as ethnographers that we do not use only pre-determined definitions or checklists when we study other cultures.

Functional definitions focus on what religion does, either socially or psychologically. For example, rituals would be seen as a means to bring a group together and bring individuals comfort. One of the problems with functional definitions is that they could apply equally well to beliefs and behaviors that are not religious in nature. Some scholars feel that functional approaches are reductionist, reducing religion to a few feelings and behaviors that are not, in and of themselves, religious. For these reasons, it can be difficult to separate religious and nonreligious systems using a functional definition. This does not mean that the social and psychological functions are not important. They are, and functionalism as a theoretical approach to studying religion has much to offer. As a definition, however, it alone is not sufficient.

An **essentialist definition** of religion looks at what the essential nature of religion is. It emphasizes that religion is the domain of the *extra-ordinary*—things beyond the commonplace and the natural. On the basis of this idea, we would say that religion is a system

of beliefs and behaviors that deals with the relationship between humans and the sacred supernatural.

The term **supernatural** refers to things "above and outside of the natural." Supernatural entities and actions transcend the natural world of cause-and-effect as we empirically know it. In the supernatural world, wondrous things can occur, and supernatural beings often defy the basic laws of nature. In the supernatural world, objects can move faster than light, heavy objects fly, and creatures become invisible.

However, not all supernatural phenomena are thought to be religious. Consider the folktale in which the handsome prince is turned into a frog. This is surely a supernatural occurrence—handsome princes do not turn into frogs in the natural world—but this occurrence is hardly religious. To address this problem, we add the term *sacred* to the definition of religion. **Sacred** denotes an attitude wherein the subject is entitled to reverence and respect by a specific group or community.

The problem with an essentialist definition is that such definitions often become too specific, focusing narrowly on spirit beings, for example, or they risk being too vague if they only reference the supernatural. As with other definitions we have looked at, essentialist definitions by themselves may not be enough, but they do point to areas of great importance in religion.

The practices that are included under the rubric of religion vary from scholar to scholar, and definitions that focus upon religious systems found in large, urban societies differ considerably from those found in small-scale societies. Each previously explored definition offers clues to important elements of religion, but each by itself is incomplete.

A true understanding of the breadth of religious practices among the world's societies will become clearer as you progress through this text. We encourage you to keep an open mind and settle on a definition as you gain more knowledge and understanding. However, as an endeavor in the social sciences, this text will use an operational definition in order to proceed.

Perhaps it is best to think of **religion** as a set of cultural beliefs and practices that usually include some or all of a set of basic characteristics. While not an exhaustive list, it will provide us with an *operational definition* as we move ahead with our studies of religious systems. These characteristics are as follows:

- a belief in **anthropomorphic** supernatural beings, such as spirits and gods
- a focus on the sacred supernatural, where sacred refers to a feeling of reverence and awe
- the presence of supernatural power or energy that may be found in supernatural beings as well as physical beings and objects
- the performance of ritual activities that involve the manipulation of sacred objects to communicate with supernatural beings and/or to influence or control events
- an articulation of a worldview and moral code through narratives and other means
- a provision for the creation and maintenance of social bonds and mechanisms of social control within a community
- explanations for the unknown and a sense of control for the individual

The domain of religion

The discussion of definitions highlights cultural differences. The very concept of religion as a separate cultural category is a Western one. Western cultures are divided into distinct cultural domains, such as economics, politics, technology, and, of course, religion. As we move through our day, our domains do not always overlap, or they overlap only to a small degree. For example, when we go to work, we might punch a clock or sign in, for "work" is a distinct segment of our life, which we can define in terms of location, activity, relationships with co-workers, and so forth. Religion as a domain may be restricted to very specific activities held in special places during specific times—a Sunday morning church service, for example. When we use the term *religion*, we might immediately picture such things as special buildings dedicated to religious activities (churches, temples, and mosques) and full-time specialists who perform religious rituals (priests and rabbis).

Our analysis of religion becomes more difficult when we turn our attention to more traditional societies. If we analyze small-scale religious systems by applying the definitions and concepts that have been developed in Western cultures, we find that certain elements that we consider to be vital parts of our religious systems may simply not exist in other societies.

For instance, many Western studies of Native American belief systems confuse the concepts "religious" and "spiritual." According to religion scholar Lee Irwin, religion is a "post enlightenment concept often rooted in polarity between ideas of the 'sacred and profane.'" He continues,

> My perception of the interactive spheres of Native communal life is that they have a relatedness through personal relationships that finds common expression in mutual, everyday concerns. Ceremonial activity, prayer, or simply carrying out daily activities like driving a friend to work or struggling for political rights may engage individuals in aspects of "religious" concern. It is that connectedness to *core values and deep beliefs* that I mean by "spirituality," a pervasive quality of life that develops out of an authentic participation in values and real-life practices meant to connect members of a community with the deepest foundations of personal affirmation and identity. In this sense, spirituality is inseparable from any sphere of activity as long as it really connects with deeply held affirmative values and sources of authentic commitment, empowerment, and genuineness of shared concerns.[17]

American Indian studies scholars Suzanne Crawford and Dennis Kelley remind us that Native cultures do not always perceive religion as a "unique and separate category of experience" and that "traditional spirituality encompassed nearly all areas of life and operated in an integrated mode with the rest of life experience."[18] Joe Sando, a member of Jemez Pueblo, concurs, pointing out that there is no word for "religion" in Pueblo languages. Instead, "knowledge of a spiritual life is part of the person twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year."[19] Thus, to Native Americans (and many other Indigenous peoples), spirituality is about relationships and the kinship bonds between humans and

all other life forms, some of which may even be inorganic, such as rocks and landscapes. Spirituality exists on a daily basis and is woven into daily activities, such as prayer or sharing food with kin, friends, and strangers.

When we study traditional societies, there might be no equivalent term to our concept of religion because it may be integrated fully into the fabric of daily belief and behavior. As Islamic scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith wrote, "To the believer, they are parts of the universe; to the observer, they are parts of a religion."[20]

The dependent and independent variables of religion

Although it may be difficult to generate an accepted definition of religion, anthropologist Felicitas Goodman[21] suggests that all religions, to some degree, share six characteristics or variables:

1. Ritual—As creatures of habit, human behavior is ritualized. Religious rituals have specific purposes and "recreate the drama of human life" from birth to procreation and death.
2. Altered states of consciousness—These are religious experiences that "can take place only if there are radical changes in the way the body functions, initiating an alteration in consciousness, in the perceptual state." Two altered states have been institutionalized: lucid dreams and the religious trance. Both states lead to an alternate reality.
3. Alternate reality—This is "another part or dimension of reality as a whole" that is culturally conditioned and internally consistent. Those who have experienced an alternate reality can recall the details of the vision for the rest of their lives.
4. Good fortune, misfortune, and the rituals of divination—Many people believe that non-human agents are responsible for the good and bad things that happen in their lives. Divination rituals attempt to discern and predict outcomes.
5. Ethics—In order for people to live in harmony with others and to maintain a balance between quotidian and alternate realities, they must obey principles of conduct incorporated into a system of ethics.
6. Semantics—Every society has words or named categories for "religion." However, such terms are often unknown, mistranslated, or misinterpreted by outsiders.

Throughout this book, we will see examples from anthropological fieldwork. These communities are found throughout the world, including some very remote areas. To better understand their nature and distribution, we organize these societies into **culture areas**, a geographical area within which societies tend to share many cultural traits.[22] These groups face similar challenges from the environment, often come up with similar solutions, and sometimes share cultural traits that have spread from one group to another (called *diffusion*).

Each human society—and even subgroups within the society—exhibits unique characteristics. The common traits that define a culture area tend to relate to subsistence activities and technology, a common response to the challenges from the environment, although there may also be some similarity in other facets of the society, including religion.

Table 1.1 Culture areas of the world

Culture area	*Societies discussed in text*	*Features*
North America		
Arctic	Inuit, Yup'ik	Hunting of sea mammals and caribou, fishing; shelters made of snow blocks, semi-subterranean sod houses, summer tents made of skins; dog-drawn sledges, tailored skin clothing; settlement in small family groups.
Subarctic	Chipewyan Naskapi	Hunting caribou or moose, fishing; conical skin tents, bark or skin canoes, snowshoes, toboggans; highly nomadic bands with chiefs.
Great Basin-Plateau	Paiute, Shoshoni, Sanpoil, Yakima	Seed or camas root collecting, fishing, hunting of small game; small brush windbreaks, semisubterranean lodges, mat tents, elaborate basketry; foraging bands.
California	Cahuilla, Chumash, Pomo	Acorn collecting, fishing, hunting of small game; simple brush dwellings, semisubterranean lodges; basketry; multiplicity of small contrasting tribes, semi-permanent villages.
Northwest Coast	Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw, Tlingit	Salmon and deep-sea fishing, hunting and collecting; large rectangular plank dwellings with gabled roofs, large canoes, lack of pottery, elaborate development of decorative art; permanent villages, chiefs, elaborate system of rank.
Plains	Arapaho, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Crow, Kiowa, Lakota, Ojibwa, Hidatsa, Mandan, Pawnee	Hunting of bison, some horticulture; tipi dwellings or earth lodges; transport by dog, later horse; absence of basketry, some pottery, rawhide utensils; large bands, competitive military and social societies, warfare.
Northeast	Iroquois, Ojibwa	Horticulture, hunting; multiple-family dwellings of bark (longhouses), wigwams; matrilineal clans, patrilineal clans or bilateral kinship, village chiefs.
Southeast	Cherokee, Natchez	Horticulture, hunting; wattle-and-daub dwellings; matrilineal clans; egalitarian societies to stratified chiefdoms.
Southwest	Apache, Hopi, Navajo, Akimel O'odham, Tewa, Yaqui, Zuni	Intensive cultivation of beans, maize, and squash; pueblos consisting of great multifamily terraced apartments, single-family dwellings with more nomadic groups; highly developed pottery and loom weaving; village as largest political unit.
Mesoamerica	Aztec, Maya, Zapotec	Intensive agriculture; state societies with monumental stone architecture, stone sculpture, system of writing, woven textiles, metallurgy; fully developed dynastic empires, social classes.

(*Continued*)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Culture area	*Societies discussed in text*	*Features*
South America		
Marginal	Siriono, Yahgan	Hunting, fishing, and gathering; family as basic social unit.
Tropical Forest	Jívaro, Mehinaku, Pirahãs, Yanomamö, Desana, Bororo, Shokleng, Shavante	Slash-and-burn horticulture; villages often consist of one communal dwelling located on rivers; bark canoes and dugouts, clubs and shields, bows and arrows, blow guns, bark cloth, hammock, tobacco; village settlements under chiefs, persistent warfare and cannibalism.
Circum-Caribbean	Arawak, Carib	Intensive farming, hunting and fishing; pole and thatch houses with streets around palisaded plazas; hammocks, poisoned arrows, loom weaving of domesticated cotton, highly developed ceramics, gold and copper worked; large villages, social classes, chiefs; extreme development of warfare.
Andean	Araucanian, Inca	Intensive irrigation agriculture; paved roads, monumental architecture, highly developed ceramics, weaving, and metallurgy; large cities, divine ruler over large empires.
Africa		
Mediterranean	Berbers	Agriculture and sheep herding; associated with Near Eastern culture, towns and cities; Islam.
Desert	Tuareg	Livestock herding (horse and camel) and tent shelters; intensive fruit and cereal cultivation, camels, sheep, goat herding, stone and plaster dwellings; Islam.
Egypt	Egyptians, Nubians	Flood-irrigated agriculture (wheat and barley); early civilization.
Western Sudan	Fulani, Hausa	Agriculture and cattle herding; urban centers, dynastic rule and empires; Islam and animism.
Eastern Sudan	Dinka, Nuer	Cattle herders and scattered agriculturalists; Islam and animism.
East Horn	Abyssinians, Somali	Agriculture and cattle herding; Coptic Christianity.
East African Cattle	Bunyoro, Maasai, Swazi, Zulu	Cattle herding, dairying, hoe agriculture; ironwork, age grades; warfare; ancestor worship.
Madagascar	Tanala	Associated with Indonesian culture; wet rice irrigation agriculture.
Khoisan	Ju/'hoansi San	Foraging; nomadic bands; brush shelters.
Guinea Coast	Beng, Bushongo, Dogon, Fon, Kpelle, Yoruba	Hoe agriculture, root crops and maize; large dynastic kingdoms, city and towns, market centers, judicial systems, craft guilds, artistic development.

Culture area	*Societies discussed in text*	*Features*
Congo	Azande, Kongo, Mangbetu, Pygmies	Yam and banana cultivation; double-court kingdoms, markets, native courts; iron and brass work; Pygmies: foraging, trade with agriculturalists.
Eurasia		
Southwest Asia	Bedouin	Cereal irrigation agriculture, plow, herding; Islam.
Central Asian Steppe	Mongols	Horses domesticated for transportation, milk, hides; Islam.
Siberian	Tungus, Tuva, Yakut	Fishing, hunting, reindeer domestication; conical skin dwellings; tailored skin clothing.
East Asian civilizations	Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Okinawan	Intensive agriculture including wet rice and animal husbandry; ancient civilizations; urban centers and industrialization; several religious systems, including Shinto and Buddhism.
Southeast Asia	Balinese, Hmong, Javanese	Wet and dry rice agriculture, water buffalo; bamboo houses; Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam.
India	Nayar, Toda	Plow agriculture, wheat and barley; caste system.
European	Basques, Viking	Mixed agriculture and animal husbandry; urbanization and industrialization; mainly Christian.
Oceania		
Indonesia-Philippine	Berawan, Dyaks, Ifugao, Tana Toraja	Irrigation and terracing, wet rice agriculture, water buffalo; large multifamily dwellings; betel consumption, elaborate textiles, blowguns; Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, animism.
Australia	Murngin, Yir Yoront	Foraging; simple windbreaks, spears and spear-throwers, bark containers; independent bands, highly elaborate kin organization; totemism.
Melanesia	Asmat, Buka, Dani, Fore, Gururumba, Trobriand Islanders, Kaluli	Yams and taro horticulture, fishing; elaborate ceremonial houses, high development of wood carving, canoes, bows and arrows; isolated hamlets under local chief, regional specialization in economic production, trading voyages; chronic endemic warfare.
Micronesia	Palau, Trukc	Yams and taro horticulture, fishing, collection of breadfruit and coconut; expert navigation in sailing canoes; intertribal warfare.
Polynesia	Maori, Samoan, Tikopia	Taro, yams, coconut, breadfruit cultivation, fishing; large, thatched dwellings; tapa cloth, kava, tattooing, sculpture in wood and stone, outrigger canoes with sails; hereditary social classes and divine chiefs; mana, tabu.

Table 1.1 lists the major culture areas of the world, along with the names of representative groups. The groups used as examples in this book are included. Many are located on the maps at the front of this book.

Besides geographical distribution, there are other ways that anthropologists organize societies. One commonly used scheme is to organize societies in terms of their subsistence strategy, focusing on how they make a living because food, water, and shelter are necessary for human survival. **Subsistence** refers to the survival strategies used to procure food from the environment. Commonly used strategies or *modes of subsistence* include foraging (hunting and gathering), horticulture, agriculture, and pastoralism. Foraging bands lack any form of plant or animal domestication and engage in hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants. They tend to live in small, isolated groups found today primarily in areas that are difficult to farm. Horticulture is simple farming of small plots with hand tools—hoes and planting sticks—in the absence of fertilization, irrigation, and other complex technologies. **Agriculture**, the intensification of farming methods, involves farming large tracts of land using draft animals, plows, terracing, irrigation, and crop rotation. Pastoral nomads raise and care for domestic animals.

Societies that have the same subsistence strategy generally have other features in common, such as settlement patterns, population density, and the presence of specialists (Table 1.2). All of these subsistence strategies are still in use today and are not mutually exclusive, for

Table 1.2 Food-getting strategies

	Foragers	*Pastoralists*	*Horticulturalists*	*Intensive agriculturalists*
Examples	San, Murngin, Shoshoni	Nuer, Maasai	Gururumba, Yanomamö, Azande	Aztec, Korean, Amish
Food getting	Food collectors: gathering, hunting, fishing	Animal husbandry	Farming with simple hand tools (e.g., hoes, planting sticks)	Farming with complex technologies (e.g., irrigation, fertilization, plows)
Community variables	Low population density, small community size	Low population density, small to medium community size	Moderate population density, medium community size	High population density, large community size
Settlement patterns	Nomadic or semi-nomadic	Nomadic or semi-nomadic	Basically sedentary, may move after several years	Permanent settlements
Specialization	No full-time specialists, some part-time	Few full-time specialists, some part-time	Few full-time specialists, some part-time	Many full-time specialists
Social stratification	Generally none	Some	Some	Significant

people might use several technologies to make a living. For instance, some foragers also practice horticulture or a form of pastoralism. Importantly, subsistence modes should not be ranked. One cannot say that agriculture is better than horticulture or foraging. Each technology reflects a people's adaptation to a particular habitat.

According to anthropologist Felicitas Goodman, "Religions vary systematically with societal type, that is, in correlation with modifications in the interaction with the habitat."[23] Goodman contends that despite the similarities and differences of world religions, they can be categorized according to a group's subsistence patterns in different environments or habitats. Besides the four subsistence strategies identified earlier, Goodman adds urbanization as a fifth lifeway or adaptation. Consider that each technology reflects a culture's adaptation to a particular environment:

- foraging—hunting, fishing, and gathering *vegetals* (wild plants)
- horticulture—simple farming using a hoe and/or digging/planting stick (dibble)
- pastoralism—animal husbandry
- agriculture—the intensification of farming methods using complex technologies, e.g., plows, draft animals, terracing, crop rotation, etc.
- urbanization—development of concentrated human populations in towns and cities

Foraging—Foraging is the oldest known subsistence pattern (Figure 1.10). Although anthropologists believe the division of labor by gender in human societies originated in foraging societies, where men and boys tended to hunt wild animals while women and girls gathered food and cared for the young, old, and infirm, these gender roles were not strict and were based, instead, on individual availability and opportunity. When gathering vegetals, or wild plant foods, both women and men noted animal tracks and pursued meat as it was available. While men tended to utilize tools such as spears, bows-and-arrows, or boomerangs (among Aboriginals) and usually hunted in groups, women used dibbles (or digging sticks) to gather not only vegetals but also any small game that was available. Plants provided a majority of the total calories consumed by most foraging groups, and plants with the highest protein content were preferred, but meat was an important food source. Although foragers have always faced problems of illness and food shortage, studies of extant foraging societies have shown that they live in harmony in their environments and take only what they need.

Myths of foraging peoples speak of a time when they were immortal, but the environment became crowded; death came about to maintain harmony and balance. Death brings sadness to foraging peoples, not only because of the loss of a member of a culture but because the habitat has suffered as well and must be consoled.

Kiowas, who were also once a foraging group, have a story about the origin of death, which involves the anthropomorphic, shape-shifting **trickster** known as *Saynday*. Once, long ago, Saynday and Red Ant were discussing the topic of death. Saynday argued that when someone dies, they should be able to come back to life, but Red Ant disagreed, saying that death should be final. Saynday acquiesced and made it so. Several days later, Red Ant's son died, and he begged Saynday to bring his son back to life. However, Saynday held to their agreement and did not reanimate Red Ant's son. In his grief, Red Ant took

Figure 1.10 Ju/hoansi San, Namibia. Foraging people have a close, intimate relationship with the environment.

Source: Wiki Commons

a knife and cut his body almost into thirds. This story not only relates the origin of death but also calls attention to the shape of the ant's body today. It also reflects earlier Kiowa mourning customs, in which women cut themselves following the death of a close relative.

Religious practices in foraging societies focus on:

1. **Ensuring future supply of game**. Because foragers/hunters do not control animals through breeding, they must rely on supernatural intervention to ensure a future food supply. For instance, Inuit hunters throughout the Arctic throw the unused bones of seals and fish back into the ocean so that they can reanimate, Australian Aborigine hunters conduct rites to increase animal fertility, and nineteenth-century Plains Indian Sun Dances were performed to renew the people and the buffalo.
2. **Ensuring success in the hunt**. Many hunting peoples believe in a "spirit owner" of game animals who must be appeased after the animal is killed. The spirit owner, or guardian of the species, endowed with mystical power, is perceived as a large and idealized member of that species. Offerings are given to the spirit owner to express gratitude for providing meat for the people. For instance, facing a dying animal to the east and pouring water into its mouth is a "bloodless" sacrifice. American Indian hunters might offer tobacco to the spirit of the slain animal. Hunters also follow certain taboos in order not to offend the spirit owner; angering it could cause the animals to go away. Many Baffin Island

Inuit believe in *Sedna*, the guardian spirit of marine animals. Hunters must offer water to dying animals to placate their departing spirits. Otherwise, Sedna becomes offended and causes the marine animals to leave, creating hunger among humans.

3. **Ensuring equitable distribution of the catch.** Hunters often practice ritual food sharing after the kill. Netsilik Inuits of the Central Arctic share the liver of freshly killed seals. Likewise, the Khoisans of Southern Africa pass around the liver and other entrails at the kill site. Khoisan hunters, who may use arrows belonging to other hunters, decide whose arrow killed the animal; the owner of the arrow, not necessarily the one who shot the animal, distributes the meat. The killer, therefore, is not the owner of the meat: one cannot own what was given as a sacrifice by outside forces.
4. **Ensuring gain in mystical power**. Many cultures believe guardian spirits exist in animal form and humans can obtain these powers. For instance, the Pentecost Islanders of Melanesia believe that a man who obtains power from pigs and snakes will be successful in society. In Native North America, animals appear as spirit helpers to bestow recipients with power; among many groups, the bear is noted for its power to heal the sick.[24]

Horticulture—Horticulture, or simple farming of small plots with hand tools—hoes or dibbles (digging/planting sticks)—produces more calories per unit of labor than foraging. After plants were domesticated in different parts of the world—Asia, Africa, and the Americas, beginning ca. 10,000 years ago—various farming technologies appeared, including horticulture (Figure 1.11). Although simple farming augmented food brought in through foraging and usually created a more controlled food supply, it is also associated with an increase in famine and food shortage, something that increases dramatically in agricultural societies.[25] Unlike wild plants, domesticates are almost totally dependent on human intervention. Most Native Americans employed horticultural farming technologies using hoes or dibbles made of sharpened sticks and antlers. For instance, nineteenth-century Pawnees of central Nebraska broke the soil with bison scapulae (shoulder bone) hoes, and Hopi farmers in Arizona still use dibbles to plant corn in sandy soils that retain water. Note that not all peoples became horticulturalists; some remained foragers, augmented hunting and gathering with horticulture, or developed more intensive agricultural methods.

Figure 1.11 A horticultural plot (*milpa*) in Michoacán, Mexico. Horticulturalists use intercropping so that diverse plants grow, intermingle, and share resources.

Source: Wiki Commons

Goodman contends that humans "distanced themselves from the habitat" after the advent of domestication and horticultural technologies. By breaking the soil (hoeing and

digging), horticulturalists departed from foraging attitudes by forcing Mother Earth "to yield what she did not have readily available." Though cultivation brought about a predictable and stable source of food, some cultures saw planting the earth as analogous to the rape of a mother, which brought about feelings of "guilt." Thus, apocalyptic prophesies about the "end of the world as ultimate retribution for this sacrilege" first appeared among horticulturalists. Today, the Hopis believe that World War III will destroy the earth, and the Apapocuva-Guaranís of Brazil predict a future world called the Fifth World.[26]

Religious practices that horticultural societies focus on

1. **Distance from the habitat.** Burial customs in horticultural societies suggest that people no longer needed to console the habitat after the advent of farming systems. "Instead, attention focused on healing the rent in the social fabric."[27]
2. **Plants have souls.** Like animals, plants are imbued with magical powers that are accessible to humans, and many cultures have beliefs associated with food as spirits. The Balinese (Indonesia) and Ifugaos (Philippines) believe that rice—their principal food—has a soul. Certain Melanesian cultures believe in a supernatural guardian of plants, such as Orokaiva food spirits that damage poorly-tended gardens. Among the Kwomas of New Guinea, a man cannot eat yams he has planted, for they are connected to his own body; another man has to plant them for him.[28]

Pastoralism—Sometime after plant domestication, animals began to be domesticated. Pastoralism involves raising and caring for domesticated animals. Pastoralists usually live in arid grasslands and steppes where inadequate rainfall precludes farming or foraging (Figure 1.12). Pastoralists have two adaptive strategies: (1) *transhumance* involves relocating livestock seasonally, usually to mountain pastures during the summer and lower elevations in the winter, or (2) *nomadism* in which pastoral nomads seek ample pasturage seasonally or more often across wide expanses, like the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, and Gabras of Kenya.

Figure 1.12 A gaucho (pastoralist) in Chile. Pastoralists rely on agricultural societies to obtain vegetable foods.

Source: Wiki Commons

Pastoralists subsist primarily on the byproducts of their animals: milk, cheese, blood, and, on rare occasions, meat. Trading with sedentary farmers for critical domesticated crops oftentimes in the past led to raiding and plundering by needy pastoralists, especially during periods when agriculturalists were facing their own

shortages of crops. Throughout Old World ancient history, nomadic pastoralists like Mongols and Arabs challenged empires by controlling villages in large agricultural areas, often engaging in surprise attacks and swift retreats on camels or horses.

Unlike foragers, who mostly encounter animals while hunting, pastoralists interact with their animals on a daily basis, lessening the necessity of supernatural intervention to control their behavior. Pastoralists like the Dinkas, Nuers, and Ila-speaking peoples of East Africa personify their animals as sentient beings with souls and consider them to be family members. These cultural groups also practice the removal of their own dental incisors in order to look like their cattle, and Dinkas and Nuers greet a young man by the name of his ox. Bantu-speaking peoples also practice a milking ritual after the return of cattle loaned out to others, and the owner will not drink the milk of his cow until this ritual is performed to re-establish their relationship. In a similar fashion, a bride drinks the milk of her husband's cows to signify marrying into his clan.[29]

Religious practices that pastoralist societies focus on

1. **Animals as mediators.** Herders do not alter the habitat but interpose their animals to exploit it. Animals "represent the bridge between humans and the all-encompassing habitat, both in subsistence and also psychologically." Because the environment is sacred, they are mediators who serve as "the bridge or messenger between the habitat and its alienated children."[30]
2. **Sacrifice of domestic animals**. These are "bloody" sacrifices, in which the meat is eaten, although the animal is not sacrificed just to feed the people. Usually, the ritual meal is a social occasion in which deceased ancestors are invoked to share the food. The main purpose of the sacrifice is to please the supernatural powers. Ethnologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard noted that among the Nuers of South Sudan, "It is the role and destiny of the cattle to be slaughtered in sacrifice."[31]
3. **Equitable distribution of meat**. Animal owners are pressured by religious considerations to sacrifice some of their animals periodically. The meat is distributed throughout the community, and there are rigid rules, with supernatural sanctions, about how to divide the meat.[32]
4. **Emphasis on male generative power**. Along with animal domestication came an emphasis on male generative power, as noted by phallic art.[33]

Agriculture—Agriculture involves the intensification of farming methods, or farming large tracts of land using draft animals, plows, terracing, irrigation, and crop rotation to produce more calories per unit of land. Because agricultural economies create a surplus, storage is crucial. Agricultural societies feature complex social organization, stratification, and a well-defined system of labor. In the past, state societies could not exist without a solid agricultural base. In the Americas, early state societies appeared in Mesoamerica (Mexico and Upper Central America) and along the Pacific coast of South America. The Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas utilized agricultural technologies without using draft animals (Figure 1.13).

Figure 1.13 Inca agricultural terraces used to intensify production. The Andean peoples use a foot plow called a *chakitaklla*.

Source: Wiki Commons

State societies, however, flourished elsewhere. In Africa, there were state societies throughout the continent, including the Ajuran Empire, Mali Empire, Oyo Empire, and Numidia, all of which were focused on trade, a key attribute of state societies. The Kingdom of Zimbabwe (located in what is now modern-day Zimbabwe) controlled the majority of the African gold and ivory trade at one time and is known for its outstanding monumental architecture. In Asia, the Mesopotamian, Persian, Indus Valley, and Chinese civilizations were well-developed and known for sophisticated city planning and flourishing development of the arts.

Through their rituals, agriculturalists express the need to control their environment, primarily because they are tied to the land as a productive base and cannot easily move. Unlike horticulturalists, agricultural peoples have no "remorse" for tilling the earth. Instead of guilt, they express concerns about "bad" plants (weeds) and animals that invade their fields; they are pests to be exterminated. According to Goodman,[34]

> These attitudes are part of a hidden, more abstract complex. In the agricultural adaptation, humans have drawn a magic circle around themselves, their homes and fields. They are confined within their fences, but also protected against what lies beyond. Any intrusion is experienced as threatening in the extreme. The intruder brings with it danger, sickness, pollution, the curse.

Replacing "ravished earth" prophecies of horticulturalists are prophecies predicting future cataclysms that will replenish the earth with more desirable people. Stories of past cataclysms, like the Great Flood, abound across the cultures of early state societies.

Religious practices that agricultural societies focus on

1. **Planting and harvest rituals.** These are technological rituals that deal with the capricious nature of the environment. Farmers contend with droughts, floods, weeds, insects, plant diseases, and other calamities that necessitate protective rites. Planting rituals ensure the success of the crops as they grow. Maya fields are rectangular like the *quincunx*, the horizontal plane of the earth's surface. Before planting, the farmer builds an altar and

prays to the supernatural beings that provide food. Like many tribes from the Southeast, eighteenth-century Creeks (Muskogees) practiced a Green Corn, or Busk festival, held in early August when the corn began to ripen. Busk rituals involved cleaning out the homes, destroying old clothes, tools, and household utensils, and disposing of old food, which aligns with the theme of renewal.

2. **Sacrifice of domestic animals**. Like pastoralists, agriculturalists sacrifice animals, but "agricultural societies address their sacrifices to ancestral spirits more than herding societies do" because their ties to the land date back for generations. As with pastoralists, the sacrifice allows the living to communicate with and nourish the ancestors who are buried close by.[35]

Urbanization—Permanent agricultural villages developed into larger urban centers due to nearby food resources that were both predictable and abundant. Most ancient cities were situated on rivers linking to trade routes for the transportation of food and other products. City dwellers do not produce food themselves but rely on subordinate producers, including farmers. Goodman contends that,[36]

> Urbanites are divorced from the habitat. The earth, the sky, the rain, the plants, and the animals are not their partners in the struggle for subsistence. This alienation became even more pronounced with the advent of industrialization, eventually causing the destruction of traditional peasantries and the takeover by agribusiness. The latter has no direct tie with the habitat at all. Rather, it exploits it by the interposition of machinery. The earth, the land, is nothing but the site, the location of manufacture, commerce, and services.

To urbanites, the environment is an outside force that is "distant, incomprehensible, and blind." Urbanites express no guilt feelings towards the habitat yet maintain "a morbid curiosity about cataclysmic prophecies" where exceptional individuals will be saved by extra-terrestrial beings.

Religious practices that urban societies focus on

1. **Introduction of new religions.** City dwellers bring their belief systems and religious practices to the new environment of the city and pass them along to their children.
2. **Missionizing from traditional faiths.** New religions are brought into cities by missionaries who proselytize their faith, though intergenerational conflict results when the youth find that the beliefs and practices are not relevant to their environment. Oftentimes, people join congregations for social gain, e.g., to fit in with a community.
3. **Rituals become secularized**. Due to the multiplicity of religions present in urban areas, secular rituals, especially sporting events, become characteristic of cities. Sporting events involve displays of physical and mental skills of competition, resulting in winners and losers.[37]

Conclusion

As we have seen in our discussion of the definition of religion and different approaches to the study of religion, ethnocentrism can be a major impediment to developing a true understanding of religious beliefs and practices in other societies. The goal of anthropology is to move past ethnocentrism toward an approach of *cultural relativism*. This is especially true in the study of religion. The anthropological approach—and the central way of looking at the religious world in this book—is to study what people believe and do in regard to a sacred supernatural, not to judge whether these beliefs and actions are based on objective truth or not. The anthropological study of religion calls for methodological agnosticism.

Although **agnosticism** has taken on the connotation of not having made up one's mind, the original meaning of the word is different. Agnostics say that the nature of the supernatural is unknowable and that it is as impossible to prove the nonexistence of the supernatural as it is to prove its existence. In this book, we will seek neither to prove nor to disprove but merely to observe. In the words of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, writing in the seventeenth century, "I have made a ceaseless effort not to ridicule, not to bewail, not to scorn human actions, but to understand them."

Summary

Anthropology is the study of humanity. Anthropologists study human societies as integrated wholes, an approach termed *holism*. This approach is seen in the broad scope of anthropology, which is often divided into the fields of biological anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology. In cultural anthropology, societies may be studied over long periods of time during which the investigator lives within the community and participates in the lives of the people under study, a technique known as *participant observation*. The final product is an *ethnography*, a descriptive study of a human society.

Anthropologists attempt to see the world through the eyes of the people being studied (emic perspective) and understand others through a more scientific lens (etic perspective). In their description and analysis of people's customs and ideas, anthropologists practice *cultural relativism* and do not judge other cultures unless there are human rights violations under consideration. The goal is to study what people believe, not whether or not what they believe is true or right.

A central concept in anthropology is *culture*. Culture includes all aspects of the human experience passed down from generation to generation. Culture gives meaning to reality; we live in a real, physical world, but our minds interpret this world through a cultural lens and even create new realities.

There have been many theoretical approaches to the study of religion. The *evolutionary approach*, developed in the late 1800s, focused on when and how religions began and how they evolved from the simple to the complex. The *Marxist approach*, based on the writings of Karl Marx, sees religion as a construction of those in power, designed to divert people's attention from the exploitation in their lives. The *functional approach* asks the question: What does religion do? For example, Malinowski concluded that magic functions to provide control and certainty in an otherwise uncertain situation. The *interpretive approach*,

associated with Clifford Geertz, believes that the task of anthropologists is to make sense of cultural systems by studying meaning. The *psychosocial approach* is concerned with the relationship between culture and personality and the connection between the society and the individual, and the *bio-cognitive approach* studies religion as a product of the stimuli in the brain. The *postmodern approach* is a theoretical movement that emphasizes subjectivity over objectivity, reflexivity, and the belief that all knowledge is a human construction that scholars must seek to deconstruct.

Religion is a difficult concept to define when we try to include all human societies. An *analytic definition* focuses on how religion manifests itself or is expressed in a culture. A *functional definition* is concerned with the role that religion plays in a society. Finally, an *essentialist definition* looks at what the essential nature of religion is and emphasizes the fact that religion is the domain of the extraordinary. Our *operational definition* in this textbook looks at religion as a set of cultural beliefs and practices that usually include a basic set of characteristics and draw on elements of all three of these approaches.

When studying religion, it is important to understand the broader aspect of a group's culture: how they make a living, how they relate and interact socially, and how decision-making is distributed within the group. As societies change and adapt to diverse physical environments and subsistence systems, including foraging, horticulture, agriculture, pastoralism, and urbanization, religious beliefs and practices shift as well. While foragers frequently have an interactive social relationship with the flora and fauna within their environments, more intensive extractive subsistence systems, such as agriculture, increasingly see the physical environment purely in terms of its material resource value. These changing relationships and value systems are reflected in religious beliefs and practices.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 1.

Study questions

1. What is an "anthropological perspective"? How does an anthropological perspective help us understand religion?
2. What are the differences between an emic and etic perspective? Why is this important in the study of religion?
3. Identify and explain the primary theoretical approaches to the study of religion.
4. What is the practice of cultural relativism, and why is it important in anthropology?
5. What is the operational definition of religion presented in Chapter 1? What are the advantages of using an operational definition?
6. What are some of the primary ways that religion shifts from one subsistence pattern to another?
7. Think back to a ritual you have attended—a wedding ceremony, for example. Write three brief descriptions of the ritual from each of the following viewpoints: analytic, functional, and essentialist.

Notes

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31 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 269.
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Chapter 2

Religious symbols

All animals communicate with one another. Most often, this communication is simple and specific to the situation. A stimulus—such as the sight of a stranger, predator, or food—may bring about a response of some kind: threat, flight, or social interaction. The reaction is an immediate response to the specific circumstances.

Humans also encounter things like strangers, predators, and food. However, the human response is more complex than other living creatures. Humans may react to the presence of a stranger entering their midst by seeing the stranger as an enemy warrior, a merchant, or a monk, for example. The reaction to a predator might be to prepare a spear for defense or to perform magical rites to ward off the danger. While humans might feel hunger and respond to the presence of food, many edible and nutritious foods are shunned because of cultural or religious prohibitions. All of these behaviors involve communication, be it storytelling, ritual, or the articulation of food prohibitions.

The complexity of human communication is made possible through the ability of humans to create and use symbols. Symbols permit people to discuss abstract topics and talk about things in the past, in an envisioned future, or even in a supernatural world. The world of religion is a symbolic world. Interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously defined religion as

> a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[1]

Geertz saw the defining feature of all religious systems as symbols because they move people and aid them in understanding the world as they envision and create it. In essence, through symbols, humans become *co-creators* of the cosmos they inhabit.

What is a symbol?

In its simplest form, a **symbol** is something that stands for something else with no necessary natural connection. It is **arbitrary**, meaning it is not directly related or connected to what it symbolizes. As long as there is agreement within a community as to the meaning

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of the symbol, individuals can communicate with one another using symbols standing in for tangible and intangible objects and concepts.

Being able to create and use symbols is critical to being human. We use symbols to refer to things not directly in front of us—a faraway place, for example, or something we would like to do in the future, including talking about and sharing this with others. This ability to use symbols to refer to things and activities remote from the user is termed **displacement**. Symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner described symbols as being **multivocal**, meaning they have many possible meanings.[2] A symbol's meaning can shift depending on circumstances (*operative meaning*), the group's particular interpretation of the symbol (*exegetical meaning*), and even other artifacts found alongside the symbol (*positional meaning*). These properties of symbols make them *open* or changeable. Consider, for example, the cross as a Christian symbol. What it means at a church altar is quite different from what it means at a cross burning by the Ku Klux Klan. Symbols are dense, multi-layered, and have meanings fully understood only by the groups (and sometimes sub-groups) using the symbol.

We also use symbols to refer to states of being or to ideas. Symbols can stand for emotions and complex philosophical concepts that exist only in our minds. Symbols can create a supernatural world or create myths about the past. Joseph Church, discussing language, writes:

> [W]e can manipulate symbols in ways impossible with the things they stand for, and so arrive at novel and even creative versions of reality . . . We can verbally rearrange situations which in themselves would resist rearrangement . . . we can isolate features which in fact cannot be isolated . . . we can juxtapose objects and events far separated in time and space . . . we can, if we will, turn the universe symbolically inside out.[3]

Many symbols are physical objects or artistic representations. Symbols do not have to be physical, however. Language is a system of symbols, but here, the symbols are sounds and characters (e.g., letters or logograms). The only reason that the word "apple" means a particular type of fruit is because when we learned English, we learned that the combination of sounds and/or letters that make up the word "apple" stands for that particular fruit. There is nothing inherently connecting the sound of the word *apple* to the fruit it is designating. In fact, this fruit is known by many other names in other languages—*manzana* in Spanish and *elma* in Turkish, for example.

Religious symbols

Spend a moment looking at Figure 2.1. What elements stand out in the photos? What do the people participating in the ritual appear to be doing? What is their demeanor? What particular artifacts are being used? These photos were taken at Primero de Agosto (August 1), the Day of Pachamama (Mother Earth) in the northwestern Andes of Argentina. It is an annual ritual during the first days of August to petition Pachamama for a good agricultural season and to show respect for the earth. In this part of the Andes, agricultural families who share access to the same irrigation canals celebrate Primero de Agosto together. In

Figure 2.1 (a) and (b) Día de la Pachamama in the northwestern Andes of Argentina.
Source: Photo courtesy of M. Snipes

Figure 2.1(a), seven families are represented by one or more members of their household. If you look closely, you can see the man in the foreground passing a plastic bag of coca leaves to his left. Each family shares its leaves with everyone present, and they chew the coca leaves that belong to each other. Coca leaves are chewed as an analgesic, but when they are shared, they *symbolically express* community and solidarity. They mark social bonds between individuals.[4]

Figure 2.1(b) is a close-up of the altar to Pachamama. Notice the paraphernalia used in the ritual. Each family contributes a container of *chicha* (homemade corn beer most often carried in a re-purposed plastic *bidón* that used to hold cooking oil), *trago* (homemade whiskey in a glass bottle or terracotta pot), coca leaves, *harina de maíz* (corn flour), and *k'oa* (a resinous incense burned on the pottery sherds as an aromatic). These are communal offerings to Pachamama, a "giving back" of some of the gifts that they believe she has shared with them—water, food, and community. Notice the cup being tipped to the ground: participants have excavated a small hole near the base of the white stone, and they are now "feeding" Pachamama (this is called *ch'ala* in Quechua, their Indigenous language).

Figure 2.1 is filled with symbols—the individuals participating in the ritual symbolically represent their families; each of the ritual elements being shared represents a gift or provision from Pachamama. The colors of the altar also serve as symbols. In northwestern Argentina, Pachamama is almost always represented by a white stone. The stones for the altar (called the *mojón*) can be a milky quartz rock, a calcified stone, or a stone painted white, but it will be primarily white. Why do you think a Pachamama (Mother Earth) stone would need to be white? At first, you may think about a deity and the idea of purity or absence of color, but the color white is also connected to milk. After all, it is a ritual to *Mother* Earth. The red "sash" tied around the stone is to "dress" the stone with dyed wool, representing the herd animals (goats and sheep) that Pachamama provides, and, if you look very closely, you will see corn flour sprinkled on the stone and sash. The flour is a recognition of the blessings of corn, a plant sacrifice or offering.

From the previous example, you can see that symbols are important elements in religious practice, and religious rituals involve the manipulation of symbols. This is true across religions, from foraging to agricultural societies. In Hinduism, we might approach a statue representing the god Brahma and find it bathed with milk and strings of flowers hung around its neck. Likewise, people in many different culture areas use masks to personify gods, such as the masks of the Hopis of the American Southwest and the Dogons of western Africa. The sand mandalas of the Tibetan Buddhists are a religious art form created ritually to allow for prayerful contemplation (Figure 2.2). There are myriad ways that symbols act within religion.

Figure 2.2 A Tibetan Buddhist creating a sand mandala. Mandalas are used in various ways to allow for meditation and prayerful focus. Sand mandalas are ritually destroyed after they are finished, allowing practitioners to consider the transitory nature of human life.

Source: Wikimedia

Of course, not all symbols are physical artifacts or artistic representations. Words, written and spoken, are also critical elements in religious practice. In Jewish ritual, the Torah is removed from the ark with great ceremony to be read in a service. In Tantric Buddhism, found in Tibet, words or formulas have great spiritual power, and their power is believed to grow as they are chanted over and over. Elements of music and dance and of space and time can also serve as symbols. We will begin our examination of symbols by looking at three artistic representations.

The swastika

A symbol such as the **swastika** can stand for very complex ideas and can carry great emotional resonance. Most Americans and Europeans looking at the swastika experience anger or dread. In 1919, the German Nazi Party adopted the swastika as its symbol, and it is associated with the terrible events perpetrated by the Nazis in World War II. A swastika spray-painted on a wall can be legally defined as a hate crime in Germany and the United States.

But the swastika also serves as a religious symbol in some faith traditions. As a pattern of lines set at right angles to one another, clockwise or counterclockwise, it carries no inherent meaning. The word itself, *swastika*, is derived from the Sanskrit *su* ("good") and *avasti* ("to exist"), and it is found in the religious art associated with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. It is also found in the ancient art of Scandinavia and the Middle East and even in early Christian art. In most of these contexts, the swastika has a positive meaning, such as prosperity and good luck. However, in some cultures, the reverse swastika is called the *sauvastika* and stands for darkness, misfortune, and suffering.

In Navajo art, the swastika represents the Whirling Log, an element of a story found in the creation myth (Figure 2.3). The Whirling Log was a type of dugout canoe built by the gods. The symbol represents the log with a support pole underneath. Attached to each end is a rainbow rope that stands out straight as the log whirls. The culture hero, Self Teacher, traveled in this canoe on an epic journey. This design element is used in many rituals, including the Night and Feather chants, and is depicted in Navajo material culture.

Figure 2.3 Navajo blanket with a swastika, woven of white, red, and dark brown sheep's wool, with a storm motif. Note the swastikas at each end (early twentieth century).

Source: Retained

The pentagram

The term **pentagram** can refer to any five-sided figure, but it is generally used to refer to a five-pointed star, also called a **pentacle** (Figure 2.4a). Pentagrams are among the most widely used religious symbols, both historically and cross-culturally.

Some researchers believe that the pentagram originated as the symbol of a pagan goddess associated with the apple. If an apple is cut in half through its equator, the seeds of the apple form a pentagram in each half. The pentagram was associated with the Hebrew Scriptures as a symbol of the five books of the Pentateuch (the Torah), and early Christians used the symbol with a variety of meanings, including the representation of the five wounds of Christ and the star that prophesied the birth of Jesus. The pentagram is also used by the Masonic order, which traces its origins back to Pythagoras and ancient Greece.

It was only during the time of the Witchcraze that the pentagram began to take on a connotation of evil. During this time, the symbol was actually referred to as the "witch's foot." This association with evil became stronger for many when twentieth-century Satanists adopted the pentagram as their symbol. The

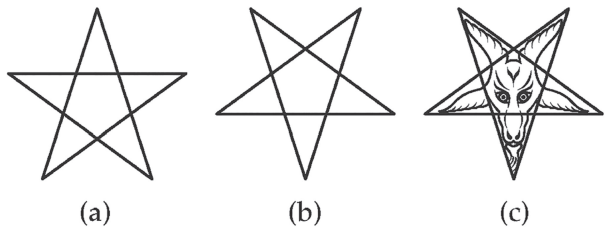

Figure 2.4 The pentagram (a) Pentagram, (b) Satanist inverted pentagram, (c) symbol of the Church of Satan.

Source: Retained

Satanist symbol is an inverted pentagram, most commonly shown with a goat's head at the center (Figure 2.4b, c). (The Witchcraze and Satanism are discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.)

As with the swastika, there are many misunderstandings about the meaning of the pentagram. Most recently, the symbol has been adopted by Wiccans, members of a Neo-Pagan religion that is reviving pre-Christian religious practices. (We will discuss the Wiccan religion in more detail in Chapter 10.) Wicca is a nature-based, polytheistic religion that emphasizes the use of good magic and not doing harm. For some Wiccans, the pentagram represents earth, air, fire, water, and spirit; for others, it refers to the four directions and spirit.

Christian symbols

The **cross** is the symbol most clearly associated with Christianity (Figure 2.5). Yet the cross did not gain general acceptance for many centuries after the founding of the Christian religion. A Vatican sarcophagus from the fifth century shows one of the first depictions of a cross in Christian art. It is a Greek cross (with arms of equal length); Jesus' body is not shown. Some early Christians even argued against the use of the cross as a symbol of Christianity because it had earlier pagan associations, most specifically the Tau cross (in the shape of the letter T).

The cross widely used today is a Roman cross, but there is considerable variation in the exact look of the cross symbol. For example, Roman Catholic crosses are crucifixion scenes, complete with the body of Christ. The Protestant cross does not show the body of Christ because Protestants emphasize that Jesus has risen from the cross and is no longer on it. A cross with a dual flame behind it is the symbol of the United Methodist Church. The cross represents Christ, and the flame represents the Holy Spirit. The cross of the Orthodox Church has three cross bars: one for the inscription, one for the arms, and one for a footrest.

The simple fish symbol was the most important early Christian symbol, not the cross. There are several reasons why the fish was used. One reason is that Jesus referred to the apostles as "fishers of men." The most commonly given reason, though, is that the letters of the Greek word for fish, *ichthus*, form an **acrostic**. An

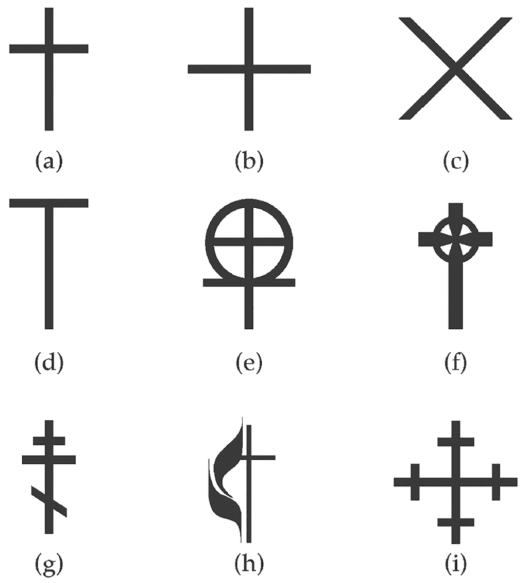

Figure 2.5 Some Christian symbols. (a) Roman Cross, (b) Greek Cross, (c) Cross of St. Andrew, (d) Tau Cross, (e) Coptic Cross, (f) Celtic Cross, (g) Cross of the Russian Orthodox Church, (h) Cross and Flame of the United Methodist Church (®The United Methodist Church), (i) Jerusalem Cross.

Source: Retained

acrostic is a word that is derived from the first letter of a series of words. So, *ichthus* is derived from *Iesous Christos Theou Uiou Soter* ("Jesus Christ of God the Son the Savior"). In the early days, when Christians were a small, persecuted group, the symbol served as a type of password. One person would draw the first arc in the sand, and if the second person were also Christian, he or she would draw the second arc to complete the fish.

Box 2.1 The commodification of Zuni art

Almost 70 percent of the 10,000 inhabitants of the Zuni Reservation in west-central New Mexico manufacture and sell arts and crafts as a first or second source of income. Formerly horticulturalists and foragers, Zunis, or A:shiwis, adopted sheepherding from the Spanish, though by the early twentieth century, federal livestock reduction programs, fencing the reservation, upriver dams, erosion, and extreme drought resulted in the large-scale abandonment of farming and sheepherding. Few Zunis are involved in these occupations today. As traditional subsistence practices decreased, arts and crafts—silver-and-turquoise-inlay jewelry, pottery, animal fetishes, katsina dolls, paintings, and beadwork—became the major economic pursuit. Although Zunis are noted for their fine inlay silver jewelry, rising prices of silver caused many to turn to **fetish** carving, reproducing small stone carvings that represent important Zuni symbols, especially animals (see Figure 2.6).

Zuni oral traditions recall that following their emergence from the Grand Canyon and migrations to Halona Itiwana (the Middle Place), the War Twins—sons of the Sun Father—used their magic shields and lightning arrows to harden and scorch the earth's surface. This turned all the animals into stone, especially the prey animals of the six directions—mountain lion (north), wolf (east), wildcat (south), coyote (west), eagle (zenith), and mole (nadir). In the "days of the new," powers were infused in their hearts, from whence their breaths were dispatched to overpower the hearts of their

Figure 2.6 Compressed turquoise medicine bear by Stewart Quandelacy, master Zuni carver. The heartline runs the length of the bear's body.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

prey, rendering them helpless. After turning them into stone, the War Twins told the animals, "By the magic breath of prey, by the heart that shall endure forever within you, shall ye be made to serve instead of to devour mankind." Since ancestral times, Zunis have collected natural concretions and other rocks that resemble animals because the magical power associated with them brings good fortune and protection.[5]

Today, an estimated 600 Zuni fetish carvers carve and shape exotic stones to resemble prey, directional, or healing animals of the six directions. Many animals, particularly bears, feature incised zigzagged heartlines starting at the mouth and ending at the tail in an arrowhead, which symbolizes the inhalation of breath into the animal's beating heart, the source of power used to overpower prey or to send healing medicine powers. (Notably, when paid for a carving, the carver draws the cash to their mouth, slightly inhaling as a blessing.) To heighten the powers of the carving, medicine bundles consisting of an arrowhead, heishi (beads), and shell are attached to the top or sides of the carving with sinew or beaded thread. Some fetish carvings are blessed by a Zuni priest (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of Zuni priests) and are taken into the kivas for special prayers. Ceremonial fetishes are kept in clay jars and ritually fed with crushed turquoise and cornmeal. Most fetishes, however, are unblessed and sold to collectors and those who believe in their protective and healing powers.

A less common, albeit controversial, craft involves painting katsina dolls carved from cottonwood roots. In Zuni cosmology, the *kokko*, "katsinas," are "intangible spirits . . . including deities, past heroes, lost children, the ancestral dead, and numerous supernatural assistants or allies."[6] Masked dancers personify the katsina spirits in two six-month ceremonial cycles marked by the summer and winter solstices. For instance, at the beginning of the winter solstice ceremonies, six gigantic Shalakos—Couriers of the Rain Gods—plant prayer sticks in shrines outside old Halona village. During kiva and medicine society rites, katsina dolls are given to initiates to help them learn about that katsina's spirit. Katsina dolls also have personal uses: dolls connected to fertility are put in the bedrooms of couples trying to conceive, or parents sometimes place punisher, or disciplinary katsinas, in the bedrooms of naughty children.

Several Zuni artists began illustrating katsinas in the 1910s, and by the mid-1960s, Duane Dishta used opaque watercolors to paint sets of 220 and 155 katsinas. Shortly afterward, Dishta and a few others began carving katsina dolls for the commercial marketplace.[7] In recent years, Zuni tribal elders and priests have complained about carvers who manufacture and sell katsina dolls traditionally restricted to personal or ceremonial purposes. Similar to Islamic beliefs that forbid rendering images of Muhammed, they also oppose paintings and other representations of Zuni deities. One priest even suggested that the plethora of commercially sold katsinas has led to an increase in unplanned children. Some believe the few daring souls who surreptitiously carve or paint katsinas face supernatural sanctions. Publicly displayed images of katsinas—on Facebook and in newspaper and magazine articles—in recent years have caused the Zuni religious hierarchy to rebuke those responsible.

Sacred art and architecture

Although the swastika, pentagram, cross, and other symbols are important representations in their respective religious systems, they are also combined with other symbolic elements found in more complex settings or works of art. Imagine, for example, walking into a great European cathedral with its massive stained glass windows, statuary, and paintings, all containing a myriad of symbols, or walking through a Buddhist temple in Thailand, with its many representations of the figure of Buddha, each with its own complex meaning and referents.

Artistic expressions are often used to illustrate and supplement religious texts, like the figures in pre-Hispanic Maya codices and screenfold books like the *Dresden Codex*, combining astronomy and astrology analogous to today's *Farmer's Almanac*. (The *Dresden Codex* is discussed in Chapter 7.) Illustrations accompanying hieroglyphic text imparted Indigenous knowledge about celestial events, agricultural cycles, ritual calendars, and lucky/unlucky days. Maya architecture—temples and palaces—adorned with lintels and *stelae* (large slabs, usually of stone) was inscribed with glyphs proclaiming the celestial origins and accomplishments of rulers. Only a handful of literate Mayas could read the glyphs, but the arrangement of temples also revealed the divinity of the rulers.

Maya architecture and hierophany

Today, 31 distinct Maya cultures representing eight million people live where their ancestors built elaborate ceremonial centers in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula and Upper Central America (Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras).[8] Maya city-states emerged during the Middle Preclassic Period (1800–300 BCE) and flourished throughout the Late Preclassic (300 BCE–300 CE) and Classic periods (300–925 CE), though individual city-states never unified into a polity. Maya architecture designated sacred space through monuments built to praise rulers and legitimize their descent from gods by justifying their royal bloodline through symbolism using celestial metaphors everyone understood. According to archaeoastronomer Anthony Aveni, religions that "associate the creation of the universe with the origins of humanity tend to dramatize the cosmogony by attempting to reproduce on earth a miniaturized version of the cosmos."[9]

Maya architecture recreated the cosmos because the epicenters of the ceremonial centers symbolized the place of creation on Day 0–3114 BCE—when the World Tree, along with landforms and mountains, rose from the primordial sea. Classic Period Maya pyramids—referred to as "tree-stones"—and palaces are arranged around open plazas to symbolize creation. Pyramids represent the mountains that rose from the sea and signify the human-constructed *axis mundi* connecting the three vertical levels of the universe recognized throughout the Americas: Underworld, Middleworld, and Upperworld. Because of their shamanic abilities, only the royalty could traverse all three levels. During important ceremonies, shaman-kings ascended the staircases of the pyramids and walked into the temples situated at the summit (Figure 2.7). Entering through the dark recesses of the temple into the juncture of the three levels of the universe at that location, the shaman-kings manipulated supernatural powers for the benefit of the royal lineages and the welfare of the people.

Undoubtedly, the most visited Maya ruin is the Postclassic (925–1524 CE) ceremonial center of Chichén Itzá in the Northern Lowlands of the Yucatán Peninsula. Though debatable, many Mayanists believe that Toltec warriors from the Central Valley of

Mexico invaded Chichén in 987 CE. Afterward, architecture became a blend of Toltec and Maya styles, as evidenced by El Castillo, also known as the Temple of Kukulcan (the Mayan word for Quetzalcoatl), the feathered serpent. In true Central Valley style, this four-sided pyramid features four central staircases with 91 steps each, totaling 364 steps. Adding the top platform brings the total to 365, which makes El Castillo a calendar.

Figure 2.7 Temple of the Jaguar, Tikal, Guatemala. Inside, the temple represents the conjunction of all levels of the universe.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

Religious scholar Mircea Eliade coined the term *hierophany*, the manifestation of the divine in a sacred place, to indicate a moment when "something sacred shows itself to us."[10] Late afternoon, during the autumnal and vernal equinox, an astronomical hierophany occurs on the north staircase balustrade. Shadows descending the balustrade form diamond-backed shapes, or *huipiles,* that connect to the snakehead at the base of the staircase (*huipiles* represent the patterns of diamondback rattlesnakes, which is also a woven design in women's dresses). This is the shadow of Kukulcan descending from the Upperworld and traveling north to the Sacred Cenote, or well of sacrifice due north of El Castillo, where his shadow descends to the Underworld, signifying an act of renewal by a creator god (Figure 2.8).[11]

One of the unique structures in Chichén Itzá is El Caracol, which means "snail" in Spanish. To Anthony Aveni, El Caracol looks like a wedding cake sitting on top of its box. Despite its odd appearance, El Caracol is an astronomical observatory; the base or "box" has corners that align with the northwest setting of Venus and winter and summer solstice

Figure 2.8 El Castillo during the vernal equinox—note the line of shadow down the balustrade wall of the north stairway.

Source: Photo courtesy of T. Lack

sunrises. The six windows on the upper platform, or "cake," align to the Venus maximum in the north and south and equinox sunsets. Every eight years, Venus rises as Evening Star in early May, which signifies the beginning of the rainy and planting season. El Caracol is connected to the Mesoamerican Venus-Rain-Maize Complex, as evidenced by the round shape of the upper platform that represents the Central Valley wind god Ehecatl. El Caracol was an observatory used to calculate astronomical events connected to corn agriculture.

The meaning of color

As we see in Maya art and architecture, religious symbolism can be quite complex. There are many important elements in artistic representation. One of these is color. Although today we see the statues and carvings of the Romans and the ancient Mayas in white marble or the color of stone, we know that at the time these statues and carvings were made, objects of stone were often covered with paint.

Colors have cultural meanings, and they can vary greatly across cultures. In Western weddings, for example, brides wear white. This tradition began with the wedding of British Queen Victoria to Prince Albert in 1840. These meanings do not necessarily apply to other cultures. In many cultures, white is avoided because of its association with death. In Chinese culture, for example, brides traditionally wear red.

As a symbol, color terminology varies greatly across cultures. English has 11 basic color terms: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, pink, black, white, and gray. These are the colors that children learn in preschool. We also define colors more narrowly within these basic categories by using combined terms (such as red-orange) or specialized terms (such as lavender and turquoise).

All peoples in all societies, except individuals with some form of color blindness, see the entire visible spectrum of colors, but the color spectrum is not divided up into natural units of color. All languages have ways of dividing this spectrum into *arbitrary* categories labeled by linguistic terms. However, the actual number of basic color terms and how the visible spectrum is divided and recognized varies from culture to culture. Generally, languages of industrial societies tend to have more basic color terms than do languages spoken in less complex societies, such as foragers, horticulturalists, or pastoralists.

A color term, a word such as *blue*, is a symbol. In this case, the word *blue* refers not to a physical object but to a particular segment of the color spectrum or, as a physicist might define

Commodification of color

In marketing, color symbolism is considered vitally important, as it affects product appeal. Commercial colors also adapt to cultural changes and norms. Colormaker Crayola LLC (formerly known as Binney & Smith Co.) invented crayons in 1903 using paraffin wax and non-toxic colors. The original art set had 28 colors. Since that time, the colors marketed by Crayola have grown to 120 distinct colors, most associated with cultural changes in their client base. In 2020, Crayola began marketing "colors of the world" to reflect its commitment to diversity and inclusion and the cline of human skin color.[12]

it, a range of wavelengths of light. When speakers of different languages are asked to identify the range of colors covered by a particular color term, we see a great deal of variation. Symbols, including color terminology, are arbitrary and learned; they are cultural artifacts. For example, Navajos think of the ideal blue as turquoise. The stone of that color is not only important in Navajo jewelry making, but it also has religious importance. To Navajos, "blue is the color of celestial and earthly attainment, of peace, happiness, and success, of vegetable sustenance."[13]

Yoruba color terminology

The language of the Yorubas of Nigeria in the Guinea Coast culture area has only three basic color terms. Each term covers a much larger part of the color spectrum than English color terms. *Funfun* includes what English speakers call white, silver, and pale gray. *Pupa* covers red, pink, orange, and deep yellow. *Dúdú* includes black, blue, purple, green, dark brown, red-brown, and dark gray.

In the English language, some colors are paired with emotions. We say that a sad person is feeling blue; when angry, we see red; a jealous person is green with envy; a coward is yellow. Yorubas also associate colors with particular temperatures and temperaments. For example, *funfun* is associated with coolness, age, and wisdom; *pupa* evokes hotness; *dúdú* is dark and warm.

The supernatural world of the Yorubas is populated by many spiritual beings called *orisha*. (The *orisha* will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.) Obatalá, the king of the *orisha*, an ethical and merciful deity, is linked to the color *funfun*, the color of wisdom and respect. Objects associated with Obatalá are frequently colored white, and he is sometimes called the "King of the White Cloth." In contrast, Sango is associated with the color *pupa*. He rules thunder and lightning and is proud and quick-tempered, and his images are often red. Ossosi, who is associated with hunting, is introverted and unstable. He is linked to the color *dúdú*, green and blue. The messenger of the gods is an *orisha* named Esu-Elegba. He is the intermediary between the people, the gods, and ancestors and is the first deity addressed in any ritual. Representations of Esu-Elegba are usually done in black and white or, in Yoruba color terminology, *funfun* and *dúdú*. These are contrasting colors and represent the god's unpredictability. Artistic representations of Esu-Elegba in carvings, paintings, and embroideries primarily use these two colors. A Yoruba seeing such a representation can identify the *orisha* in part by the colors being used. In this way, color serves as a language.

Sacred space and sacred time

Symbols are also used to create sacred realities: supernatural worlds, sacred spaces, and sacred divisions of time. All of the examples of symbols examined thus far have been tangible, things that we can directly see, whether it is a shape or a color. Yet, not all things symbolic are physical. People also handle nonphysical entities symbolically.

Sacred space is space that is *set aside* in some way, either temporarily or permanently. Some religious spaces, such as a Wicca ritual circle, are created at the time they will be

Figure 2.9 An altar at the shrine to El Niño Santo de Atocha, New Mexico. The colors and artifacts all carry symbolic meanings.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

occupied using very specific ritual behaviors and an *athame* (a sacred knife)—then these same spaces may be dissipated or removed afterward, allowing the space to return to a secular state. Other sacred spaces, such as those of a temple, mosque, or church, are architecturally created as permanent sacred monuments. What makes a space sacred? As studied by various social scientists, spaces become sacred when they are designated for sacred things to occur in that place. What is not profane is sacred (Figure 2.9).

In his study of religion as a ritual practice, Thomas Tweed, a religious scholar, notes that space *becomes* sanctified through the action and movement of the people occupying and utilizing it. In other words, it is the symbolic use of the space that makes it sacred. Not static, sacred space is always *emerging* from the meanings that people bring to the place.[14] An earlier religious scholar, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), saw sacred space as having three primary symbolic components: *a threshold* that must be crossed from profane to sacred; an **axis mundi** located within the space that serves as the most sacred spot, such as an altar or **mihrab** (a niche in a mosque that indicates the direction of Mecca); and an overall general form that serves as a reflection or mirror of the cosmos itself, called the **imago mundi**.[15] For many Gothic churches, the sanctuary itself is a cruciform, like the Latin cross. Sacred space and ritual are deeply related to each other.

Time is also a sacred symbol in many cultures. People see time as being made up of recurring units based on observable physical events: the movement of the sun across the sky, the phases of the moon and stars, and/or the passing of the seasons. These can also be divided into phases. For example, a day can be divided based on the position of the sun (morning, afternoon, and evening). In astronomical terms, these recurring events represent such things as the rotation of the earth on its axis (a day), the journey of the moon around the earth (a month), and the travel of the earth around the sun (a year). Human activities are then organized by particular parts of the day or certain times of the year.

Humans also create units of time that are not based on real astronomical events, such as the rotation of the Earth. These units appear to be *arbitrary*. A week in our culture has seven days. Why not five, as is common in parts of Central America and Africa? Why not eight, as was found among the ancient Incas of the South American Andes? And why not 16, as is found among the Yorubas of Nigeria? The seven-day week of Western society is derived from the cultures of the ancient Near East and perhaps came from the division of

the approximately 28-day lunar cycle into four quarters. In other words, concepts such as "a week" are nonphysical symbols that stand for particular periods of time. Many of these periods do not exist in the natural world but only in the human mind.

Time is another important element of religious rituals. Rituals are performed at specific moments, often as part of a ceremonial cycle. As we will see in the next section, time often has important symbolic meaning.

The Maya view of time

Located between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, ancient Mayas had a fantastic view of the night sky, which enabled them to follow the paths of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. As stargazers, Maya priests counted time using a base-20 vigesimal system (we count with a decimal system) and devised the concept of *true zero*, which was assigned to Day 0, the Day of Creation when the land and mountains rose from the primordial sea (August 11, 3114 BCE, according to the Gregorian calendar). Scribes and priests used the Long Count calendar to count forward from Day 0 using a bar and dot counting system: a single dot equals one, a solid bar equals five, and zero is represented by a shell (Figure 2.10). Long Count dates carved on stelae and public monuments or painted on pottery were discontinued by the Postclassic Period, and the first Great Cycle of the calendar ended on December 21, 2012, 5,125 years from Day 0, but the world did not come to a catastrophic end, as some predicted (Box 2.2).

Other calendars existed. The two most important ones are the 260-Day *tzolk'in*, or divinatory calendar, and the 365-Day *haab'*, or solar calendar. The *tzolk'in* calendar, still used by Quiché Mayas in the Guatemalan Highlands, is based on a 20-day month multiplied by 13 numbers (20 × 13 = 260). Some scholars believe 20 represents human fingers and toes times the 13 layers of Upperworld, and others believe that 260 days also approximate a baby's gestation period. Archaeoastronomers suggest it also represents the interval between the appearance of Venus as Morning Star in the east and its reappearance as Evening Star in the west.

Today, K'iche Mayas consult the calendar keepers who interpret the ritual almanac to give advice about illness, land disputes, divorce, and other civil matters based on the alignment of days correlated with birth dates and other important dates. The calendar keepers also give advice about planting and harvesting. The *haab'* calendar measures the vague, or tropical, year calculated at 365 ¼ days (360 + 5 extra days = 365 days). It is based on 18 named

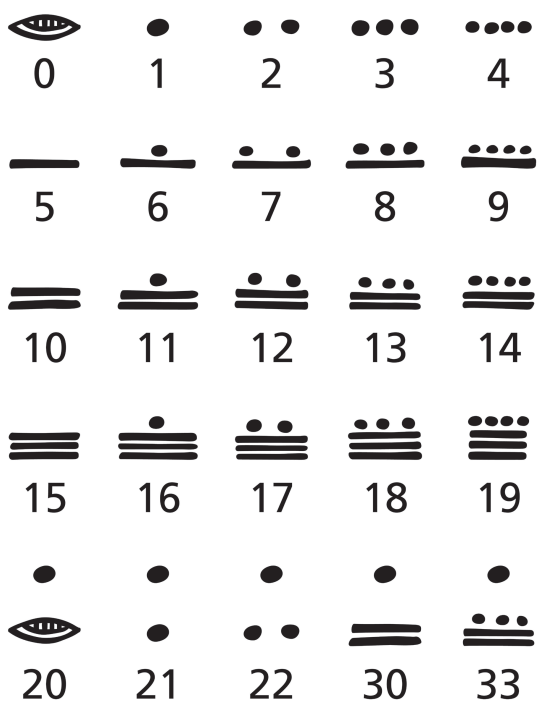

Figure 2.10 The Maya numbering system. Key: shell = 0; dot = 1; bar = 5. Combinations of these symbols are represented in numbers 0–33.

Source: Alamy

Box 2.2 The end of time

Different religious systems have different views of time. For some, time is cyclic, and for others, it is a progression from one phase to another. This was true of the ancient Mayas. The Mayas lived in the Fourth World that began on August 11, 3114 BCE. The Long Count calendar starts on this date, and from that day forward, time is divided into a series of larger and larger inclusive units. The largest of these units is the *baktun,* which consists of 144,000 days (approximately 395 years). The endpoint of each cycle was an important event in the Maya calendar. December 21, 2012, the winter solstice, marked the end of the thirteenth *baktun* since creation.[16] Although many predicted the end of the world on this date, there is no evidence that Mayas see the end of a *baktun* as an apocalyptic event.

Other religious systems also see time as being cyclical. One characteristic of Christian fundamentalism (Chapter 12) is **dispensationalism**. This term refers to the belief that God has divided the history of the Earth into distinct ages or "dispensations." In each age, God has a particular relationship with the world. This idea was developed by the Englishman John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), who read the Bible as if it were a history of predictions. He believed there were seven phases, each ending with a catastrophe—such as the Fall, the Flood of Noah, and the Crucifixion. People today are living in the Sixth Dispensation. Like previous stages, this stage, too, is predicted to come to an end in a catastrophe. However, just before, there would be a "Rapture" in which born-again Christians would be taken up to heaven and escape the sufferings of the Last Days. This is called the *pre-tribulational rapture theory*, another of Darby's predictions based on a literal reading of the Bible. Later, the born-again Christians would rule with Christ in the Seventh Dispensation, the last historical age.

William Miller (1782–1849) was a Baptist preacher who, through careful study of the Bible as a historical document, believed that the world as it was known would end in 1843. This was the beginning of an apocalyptic tradition that characterizes much of American Christianity. His movement began to spread and was referred to as **Millerism**. As the date approached, Miller predicted that the Second Coming of Christ—the Advent—would occur sometime between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. When the predicted event failed to take place, he announced a second date based upon "corrected" calculations—October 22, 1844. The failure of the Advent occurring on that date, too, is called "The Great Disappointment." Nevertheless, the idea had taken hold in American Christianity, although usually without a specified date. Out of the tradition of Millerism grew several contemporary religious traditions, such as the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

months times 20 numbers (0–19). The *haab'* calendar was independent of the *tzolk'in* and Long Count calendars.

A fourth calendar, the Calendar Round, resulted from combining the *tzolk'in* and *haab'* calendars. Thus, 260 days × 365 days = 18,980 days = 52 years with no two days alike. Through the principle of quadripartition, the 52-year calendar was segmented into 4 × 13-year subdivisions. Day 0 from the Long Count Calendar occurs as the date 4 Ahau 8 Cumku on the Calendar Round. In this representation of the Calendar Round, the two circles to the left are gears of 13 and 20 cogs of the Tzolkin calendar that cycle independently of one another, and the 365-day Haab calendar to the right. Each of the three cogs moves once daily, creating a cycle where no two days repeat for 52 years. Then, the calendar resets and begins over again (Figure 2.11).

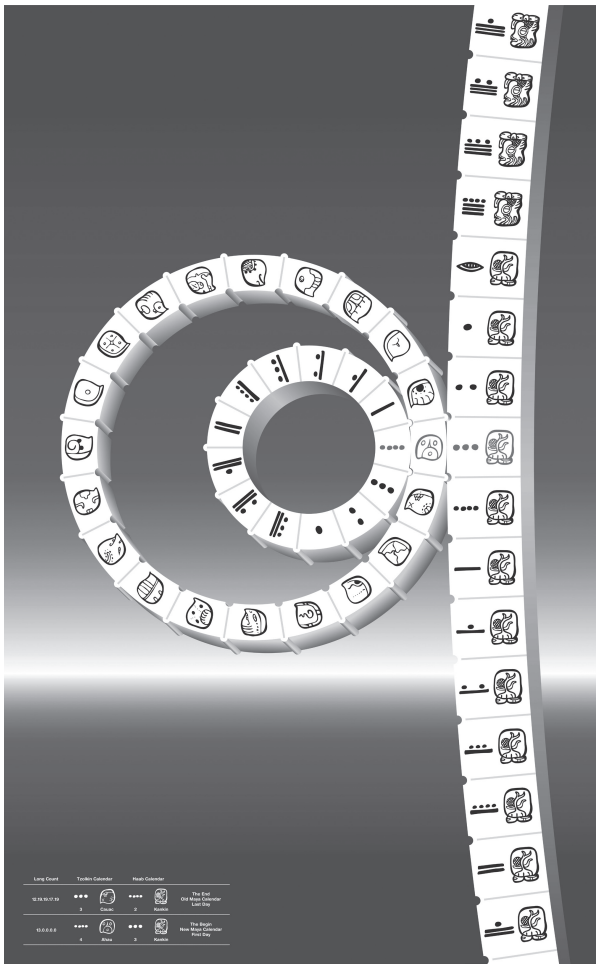

Figure 2.11 Calendar Round combining *haab'* and *tzolk'in* calendar. Left: large outer circle = 20 day signs; small inner circle = 13 numbers of the Tzolk'in calendar; Right: *haab'* calendar. Each day, the two left wheels turn one click clockwise, while the *haab'* calendar moves one click clockwise. No two days are alike for 52 years.

Source: Alamy

Rituals and calendars in modern world religions

There are many examples from modern world religions of the importance of time and calendars. **Periodic rituals** are rituals performed on a calendrical cycle, and they often commemorate the anniversary of important events in the history of the religion (for more on ritual, see Chapter 4). Because of the importance of setting the date of the celebration correctly, many religions continue to use calendars that are older than the Gregorian calendar most of us use today.

Mt. Athos, an autonomous peninsula off the country of Greece, is inhabited by approximately 2,000 Eastern Orthodox monks living in 20 monasteries, each functioning as a somewhat independent community. Sharing common religious roots, the monasteries follow the Julian calendar[17] to mark days and months and the Byzantine time system for hours—the counting of hours begins at sunset, not at midnight. These differences are dictated by religious tradition and ritual (for more on the monks of Mt. Athos, see Chapter 6).

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, the month during which the Qur'an was sent from Allah/God to Mohammad. Ramadan is a time for worship and contemplation. During this month, Muslims follow many constraints in their daily lives, such as not eating or drinking during daylight hours. At the end of the day, the fast is broken with prayer and a meal. The *Laylat-al-Qadr* (the Night of Power) is celebrated on the evening of the 27th day of Ramadan, the night when Mohammad first received the revelation of the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an, this is also the night when God determines the course of the world for the following year. The end of the fasting and the month of Ramadan is celebrated for three days in *Id-al-Fitr* (the Feast of Fast Breaking).

The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar. Each month begins with the sighting of the first crescent of the new moon. The length of the month thus defined does not divide evenly into the solar year—it is about 11 to 12 days short. As a result, the start of Ramadan shifts from year to year. In 2024, the month of Ramadan began on March 10, while in 2027 it begins February 7. One of the consequences of this is that when Ramadan falls in the winter season, the period of fasting is relatively short, and the weather is relatively cool. It is quite different when Ramadan falls during the summer season.

Another example of periodic rituals being set to older calendars is the *Yamim Nora'im* (Days of Awe), or Jewish high holy days, which are observed for a ten-day period between the first and tenth days of the month of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) marks the beginning of this time period, and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) marks the end. These are considered the most important of all the Jewish holidays and are the only ones considered purely religious and not based on any historical or natural event.

The high holy days are a time for penitence and prayer, during which Jews are given time to repent of their sins against God and ask God for forgiveness. On Rosh Hashanah, God judges the people and records His judgment in the Book of Life. However, there is a ten-day reprieve until Yom Kippur, when the Book is closed and sealed. Yom Kippur itself is a day for fasting and prayer.

The Hebrew calendar is also a lunar calendar, but in order to keep the holidays from shifting too far, a thirteenth month is added every two or three years. In some years, extra days are added to prevent Yom Kippur from occurring on the Sabbath. Thus, the major ceremonies are maintained within specific, predictable seasons of the year.

In the early Christian church, the celebration of Easter was correlated with the Jewish celebration of Passover since the Last Supper was a Passover Seder and celebrated in the spring. However, because different Jewish communities set the date somewhat differently, the early church attempted to set the celebration of Easter according to their calendar (the Julian calendar, originally based upon the calendar reforms of Julius Caesar). Yet the date kept drifting later in the year. Finally, in 1582, Pope Gregory XIII decreed a new, reformed calendar that we use today (the Gregorian calendar).

It took several centuries for the new calendar to be accepted throughout Europe and the New World. Britain and the British Empire, including the American colonies, adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752. By that time, it was 11 days out of sync with the older Julian

calendar. As a result, when the changeover took place, the date of Wednesday, September 2, 1752, was immediately followed by Thursday, September 14, 1752.

Other times, not related to a specific calendar, may also have religious significance. A common example is the time following a death, a period observed in many religious traditions. In Judaism, this period of mourning is called *shiva*. *Shiva* begins as soon as the mourner has returned from the cemetery and lasts for seven days. During this time, the mourner remains at home and does not participate in any of their normal activities, such as work or school. Friends and relatives visit the home of the mourners and often bring food. Other times set aside may include rites of passage, such as birth or puberty initiations. These occasions are usually specifically marked by ritualized symbolism.

Sacred time and space in Australia

The religious systems of the Australian Aborigines are also focused on expressions of sacred time and space. To understand these systems, we must examine the concept of **totemism**. A simple definition of a **totem**, as it is frequently called, is that of a symbol or emblem of a social unit. A special relationship is said to exist between a group or individual and its totem, which is most often an animal but can also be a plant, landform, or even a weather event, such as thunder.

The term *totem* comes from the Ojibwa language of Canada, in which the word *ototeman* can be translated as "He is a relative of mine." This refers to particular animal species, known as totems, that become associated with Ojibwa clans, a type of kinship group. The clans are given the name of the totem.

Totemism and dreamtime

Perhaps the best-known examples of totemism come from Australian Aboriginal groups. The totemic system has many components, including totemic symbols, myths, and a sacred landscape.

In contrast to isolated sacred sites, which are often the sites of pilgrimages, Indigenous peoples live on a sacred earth. The places described in their myths are places that exist in their own physical world—a stream, a cave, a mountain—and their origin stories tell of the creation of this landscape and the creation of the plants, animals, and people who inhabit it.

The creation myths of the Australian Aborigines begin in the distant past during a period called *Dreamtime* (or The Dreaming)

Animal symbols as mascots

American culture possesses emblematic symbols in athletics (mascots) and in business (logos). Many of us are familiar with athletic teams named after animals—such as bears, bulldogs, eagles, and panthers—and the selection of a team's mascot often reflects those characteristics of the animal deemed important for players to display in a particular sport or characteristics or animals associated with the team's local environment. In his study of totemism, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted that the totemic system is a way for groups to organize themselves socially, mirroring the distinctions they note in the natural world. Symbolically akin to the totem, the mascot is a secular symbol, while the totem is sacred. According to the National Congress of American Indians, there has been a steady decline in the use of Indigenous names and mascots in U.S. school teams over the past 50 years. This difference between a secular mascot and a totem is a sacred issue to many people, Indigenous and others. Some U.S. states have prohibited the use of Indigenous names as mascots.

with the creation of an earth without features, an earth devoid of mountains, rivers, and plains. Supernatural creatures then appeared on the earth. These creatures of the Dreamtime appeared from under the earth or, among coastal groups, on rafts. They then traveled over the landscape, creating the world as we see it today—the physical world, the plants, the animals, the people—as well as the customs that govern people's lives. They then left the surface of the earth or turned themselves into an object in the landscape, such as a boulder or hill. The places associated with particular mythological beings are sacred spaces that play important roles in religious rituals today. The landscape in which the Aborigines live is a canvas on which their mythology is written, and various features of this landscape serve to define the nature of their humanity.

The stories of the Dreamtime establish special relationships between humans and animals, for both are descendants of the same supernatural being that was neither human nor animal. The tie of kinship is extended to the animal world, the rest of the living world, and the physical landscape. These animals, plants, and natural objects are the totems of the community. Any particular place, be it a water hole or a hill, can be associated with a particular story and can be claimed as part of the religious heritage of a particular group of people.

Within a community, different groups of people share different totems. Totems exist for bands, clans, the sexes, and even individuals. Claiming a totem brings with it special obligations. One is a prohibition against eating the flesh of one's totemic animal, except during special rituals. It is acceptable for other members of the community, even your spouse and children, to eat your totem, but not for you because you share a special relationship with the totemic species. Members of a totemic group have responsibilities to perform religious rituals, including initiation ceremonies. There are many other rules that are part of the special relationship between an individual or group and its totem.

Totemic affiliations also organize Aboriginal societies. Specific clans are associated with particular totems. There are rules regulating who can marry whom, defining the affiliation of one's children as well as the appropriate social behaviors between different classes of kin.

The determination of the group into which a child is born can be complex. In some groups, it is determined by rules of kinship, and in many groups, pregnancy is thought to be the result of a totemic spirit, perhaps residing in a sacred water hole, entering the womb of the woman. The husband and other elders will question the woman to determine which spirit from what totemic group entered her womb to determine that child's affiliation. In some groups, the identity of the spirit is revealed in the father's dream. On death, the individual's soul returns to the totemic well.

At some point during adolescence, young men are initiated into manhood. These initiation rituals involve the learning ritual knowledge, including the ability to look at and handle totemic objects. These rituals also involve some type of alteration of the body, such as circumcision or the knocking out of a tooth. When visiting sacred places described in the Dreamtime stories, wounds are opened, or new wounds are made on the body, and a person's blood is allowed to fall on sacred objects.

Australian Aboriginal cultures has a rich tradition of symbolic religious art (Figure 2.12). This art includes arrangements of stones, decoration of sacred objects, bark paintings, and rock art. Sacred spaces, especially caves and rock overhangs, are decorated with paintings and engravings; some may be as old as 30,000 years or even older. Many of these

were created as representations of totemic creatures, objects, and events; others were thought to have been completed by the totemic beings during the Dreamtime. Some represent totemic beings who turned to stone or became paintings on a wall.

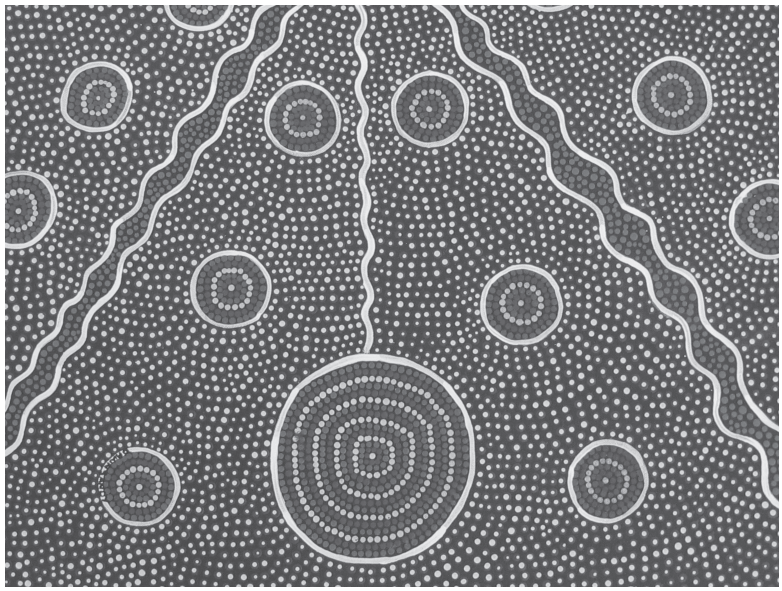

Figure 2.12 Aboriginal Dreamtime art depicting ancestral pathways (called *songlines*). This piece of art depicting songlines is entitled "Two Lovers Talwalpin and Kowinka in an Aboriginal Dreamtime" and is displayed at the Blue Planet Aquarium in Cheshire, UK.

Source: Wikimedia

The symbolism of music and dance

Music and dance are intimately connected with ritual, and at times, they play special. At times, they play special roles in religious rituals. The degree to which music and dance are included in ritual is quite variable. Some rituals simply include a song; others focus on an elaborate performance of a myth in song and dance. And sometimes music and dance are the rituals. In practices such as **chant**, which is the repetitious singing of a short passage, the performance of the chant is a prayer or meditation. Chanting, or mantra meditation, is practiced in many religious traditions and is increasingly popular today. Besides spiritual rewards, studies have indicated significant health benefits in chanting, including lower blood pressure, decreased levels of anxiety, and increased dehydroepiandrosterone levels, supporting hormones.[18]

The symbolism of music

Music is a key element in ritual, and it can involve a wide array of sounds, including natural sounds, the human voice, or material instruments. It may simply set the mood for a ceremony or may actually be the primary vehicle by which religious stories are told and by which people communicate with the gods. Music fills many roles during religious rituals and is used to teach, express or engender emotional states, to produce altered states of consciousness, to please the supernatural powers, or to make contact with them.

An important function of music is the facilitation of *memorization*. In nonliterate societies, large amounts of narrative must be committed to memory. Anyone who has had to memorize a piece of prose in school knows how difficult this can be. Poetry is easier to memorize than prose because poetry has rhythm and rhyme. The easiest of all to memorize are the lyrics to a song, primarily because of the relationship between rhythm and memory. For this reason, narratives and prayers are frequently chanted or sung.

Of course, music also sets the mood for a ritual. The organ setting the mood for a funeral, a choir singing a Medieval chant, and the rejoicing of a gospel hymn all illustrate the power of music to set the ambiance for ritual. We use music in a similar way for secular purposes. Compare the music you would select to listen to while studying with the music you would play when having friends over for a party or a date for a romantic evening. Movies also use music to set an emotional tone. We know when to be happy, sad, or frightened on the basis of the music on the soundtrack.

Many early Christian missionaries understood the influence of music and brought pianos and organs with them to remote areas of the globe. A small organ might have been played in a church in the middle of a tropical rainforest. However, many of these missionaries made the erroneous assumption that the various types of music reflect universals in moods and emotions. A somber hymn played on an organ reflects the sadness of a funeral, and a romping gospel hymn expresses the joy of closeness with God. We might assume that Euro-American religious, military, or romantic music would evoke the same emotional response in all societies. This assumption, however, turns out not to be true. In reality, Euro-American music often fails to convey its intended meaning to non-Westerners, and native musical idioms fail to move outsiders. Of course, the meaning of music is symbolic, and as such, it is part of the learned traditions of a culture.

Realizing this basic fact, many missionaries and contemporary musicians are writing music in traditional idioms and are discovering and importing tribal musical traditions into contemporary music. This is an example of **syncretism**, the blending of beliefs and values from two or more cultures. For example, the well-known Congolese composition *Missa Luba* is a Catholic Mass sung in Latin but set to musical elements and instruments of the Kongo tribe of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). African drumming, Australian Aborigine songs, and Native American flute playing have all been integrated into new musical experiences.

Music and religion
Music is integral to religion. The earliest known composer was a woman from Mesopotamia named Enheduanna (2286–2251 BCE). She was the high priestess of the moon god Nanna and wrote in cuneiform on clay tablets. Her hymns praise the goddess of love, Inanna, and the "divine wonders of the world."[19] Music varies a great deal across cultures and religions. To hear samples from different religious heritages, take a moment to listen to *raags*/*ragas* (Hindu; Sikh); *naat* (Islam); *kirtan* (Sikh); gospel (Evangelical Christianity); *pizmonim* (Jewish); orthodox chants (Greek Orthodox); Gregorian chant (monastic Catholicism); and Peyote songs (Native American Church).

Music in ritual

Music plays an important role in the lives of foraging and horticultural peoples as well. Anthropologist Stephen Feld studied the music and sound meanings of the Kalulis of Papua New Guinea and recorded their music.[20] Kalulis use a complex system of sound and senses to connect the natural and spiritual worlds,

often experiencing transition and transformation between various states of being through the use of sound, especially that of birdsong and weeping. !Kung San foragers of Botswana utilize song in their healing rituals. Several times a month, they will gather around a fire in the evening and start singing. Some members of their group, primarily men, begin to dance around the singers and enter an altered state of consciousness called *!kia*. Once they reach this stage, they move around the fire, laying hands on each individual as a healing ritual (see Chapter 11).

In some cultures, the actual musical sounds may be interpreted as sounds of the supernatural. The sound may be produced either by the human voice or instrumentally. One example of this is found among the Tuvas (Siberian culture area). For the Tuvas, much like the Kalulis, spiritual power is found in nature. These spirits manifest themselves both through physical appearance and by the sounds they make or can be made through human interaction. Examples would be the sound of running water or the echo of a human voice from a cliff. The way for humans to make contact with supernatural powers is to imitate their sounds. Caves, in particular, are important for this purpose. Caves are sites of supernatural power and can be used to contact the spirits of the earth. The type of vocal sounds Tuvas use is also interesting. They are known for a technique called *xöömei*, or "throat-singing." A single vocalist using this technique is able to produce two distinct pitches at the same time.

Besides the human voice, instruments are also important in the expression of music, and an unbelievable array of musical instruments can be found throughout the world. There are four basic types:

- **idiophones** are instruments that are struck, shaken, or rubbed. Common examples are rattles, bells, wooden drums, rasps, bullroarers, marimbas, and xylophones.
- **membranophones** are instruments that incorporate a taut membrane or skin. These include drums.
- **cordophones** are instruments with taut strings that can be plucked, strummed, hit, or sawed. These include harps, zithers, and violins.
- **aerophones**, in which air is blown across or into some type of passageway, such as a pipe, include whistles, pipes, didjeridus, flutes, and trumpets.

For some cultures, sounds produced by specific musical instruments have religious significance. The best-known examples in the anthropological literature are the *didjeridu* of the Australian Aborigines and the *molimo* of the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest of Central Africa. These are very simple aerophones that are essentially nothing more than long pipes, usually wood. The sounds of these instruments are said to be the sounds of spirits. Initiated men play the instruments out of sight of the women and children, who are told that the sound is the actual voice of the spirits. The true nature of the sound is revealed to young men as part of initiation rites.

Music plays an important role worldwide, and it is associated with religious rituals and storytelling. Membranophones, especially drums, are important instruments in Africa, for example. Rhythm is highly developed and, in contrast with Euro-American traditions, melody and harmony are secondary. Many types of drums are played, often combined into large drum ensembles.

The symbolism of dance

While the use of dance is not as common in Western religious rituals, across cultures, dance is an important means of symbolically representing the supernatural world and telling religious stories. Of course, dance does not exist in isolation. Dance is usually performed to music, frequently involves chanting or singing words, and involves the manipulation of physical symbols such as costumes and masks, sets, and props.

Culture consists of patterned, traditional behaviors. We define dance as a system of patterned, traditional movements. These movements, involving the whole body or sometimes just a part of the body, such as the hands, are symbolic in that they have culturally determined meanings. Characters in well-known stories are identified by their traditional movements, such as their way of walking and moving their arms, as well as by their costumes, makeup, and masks. In societies that lack systems of writing, dance becomes an important vehicle for telling sacred stories to the community. For example, among native Hawaiians, *hula* dances told the stories of the gods and goddesses.

Indigenous Kwakwaka'wakws of the North American Northwest Coast culture area say that a human family line was created when the ancestor of the group came down to Earth, took off his mask, and became human. Carved animal masks are an important religious art form for Kwakwaka'wakws and are frequently worn by dancers who retell important mythic stories. Dance, however, goes far beyond the telling of stories. Dances can act as offerings and many deities like to be entertained. Dancers also can become conduits of supernatural power. The Kwakwaka'wakw masked dancers, for example, become the beings whose mask is worn for the duration of the ritual (this transformation is called **transmogrification**) as dance moves them from the natural to the supernatural world.

In many cultures, gods and spirits enter the human body and take over its functioning. The particular movements during possession identify the god within the body and may actually provide communication between the deity and the human participants. For example, possession is an important feature of Vodou. During a Vodou ritual, a song summons a particular god. When the god arrives, he or she possesses one of the dancers. A common metaphor is that the dancer is a horse on which the deity rides. Which god has possessed a dancer can be deduced by the dancer's movements and actions. (We will discuss the Vodou religion in more detail in Chapter 12.)

Early in the history of Islam, a group that was most interested in the mystical aspects of the religion broke off to form the Sufi. One of the most important of the Sufi mystics was a man named Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (also called Mevlana Rumi), who lived in the thirteenth-century in the Ottoman Empire. He was a poet, mystic, and theologian who studied with and was a devotee of the Persian poet and spiritual instructor Shams-i Tabrizi. When Tabrizi mysteriously disappeared (rumored to have been murdered), Rumi revived the practice of whirling as a way to alleviate his extreme grief. After Rumi's death, his followers established the Mevlevi Order, or Mawlawiyya, in honor of him. Members of the Mevlevi Order are often called "whirling dervishes" in Turkey, where many of them settled.

Figure 2.13 Sufi "whirling" dervishes in the act of prayer. *Source:* Wikimedia

The dance itself is highly symbolic: Dervishes wear long white skirts that billow out as the dancers, arms extended in the air, continue to turn by rotating on one foot as the pivot. Through this turning, the dancers actually enter an altered state of consciousness and seek to become one with God (Figure 2.13). With their heads tilted, their right palm facing upward, and their left palm facing down, the Sufi dancer channels the positive energy and blessing they receive from God downward to Earth. The pivot foot, remaining stable and rooted to the floor, is a way of remaining rooted to the Source, to Love, while moving about and "engaging" in the dance (World) all around.[21]

Tewas from the Southwest culture area—including San Ildefonso and Santa Clara Pueblos—say that they dance to "seek life," "regain life," or "renew life." Many symbolic references to this theme of new life can be found in the movements of the dancers, the costumes, and the songs. Dancers lift their arms upward to symbolize the welcoming of rain, lower their arms to indicate digging, planting, or harvesting, and move their arms from side to side to symbolize rainbows or clouds. Costume designs are also symbolic. Long tassels represent raindrops; woven headdresses contain depictions of squash blossoms or embroidered layers of clouds. The songs that accompany the dances make references to dawn, youth, flowers, and growing corn. Tewas practice horticulture in a very arid environment, so references to rain and items associated with rain, such as clouds, thunder, and rainbows, are important symbols of life.

Tewa dances are generally held in open plazas where performers can be in contact with the earth. The dancers array themselves in long, parallel lines and move in unison to the beat of one or more drums. The dancers themselves may sing, or a chorus of singers standing nearby may accompany them. Before the dance, the participants prepare in a **kiva**, an underground room that is entered from a hole in the roof. When the dance is about to begin, the dancers emerge from the kiva and move to the plaza. This is a symbolic reference to the Tewa origin story that tells how the first people emerged from a world below into the present world.

Tattooing and other permanent body alterations

The oldest evidence of tattooing was discovered on the body of Ötzi, also known as the Iceman. Discovered in the Ötztal Alps between Germany and Italy in 1991, his mummified remains had been buried under glacial ice for 5,300 years. The tattoos appear to have been

produced by puncturing the skin and rubbing charcoal into the wounds. A recent analysis inventoried a total of 61 simple tattoos, such as lines and crosses, on his body. It is not possible to know for certain the purpose of this tattooing; however, many are located on either side of the spine and over joints that show some degree of degeneration. Perhaps they were created as part of a therapeutic ritual.

The history of tattooing in more recent American and European cultures can be traced to the voyages of James Cook in the eighteenth century. Many of Cook's sailors were tattooed during their stay in Tahiti, and the word *tattoo* is derived from the Tahitian word *ta-tu*, meaning "to mark or strike." Tattooing involves piercing or cutting the skin and then introducing a pigment into the wound. In contemporary Western societies, this is done with an electronic device, but the principle is the same.

The social implications of tattooing in Western society have changed over time. At times, tattooing has been a fad among the aristocracy or members of particular social groups, such as sailors, gangs, and prisoners. In this context, a tattoo served as a mark of social identity. At other times, tattooing has been a way to express dissatisfaction with the social order and a way to distance oneself from mainstream society. Tattoos also serve a religious purpose when one places a religious symbol or a memorial to a loved one permanently on their skin.

Closely related to tattooing is **cicatrization** or scarification. This is frequently seen in peoples with dark skin on whom tattoos would not show well. In scarification, a piece of skin is raised and cut, and some material, such as ash, is rubbed in to encourage the production of scars. Closely related to cicatrization is *branding*, in which the scars are created by burns.

Another common alteration of the body involves piercing a body part (see Figure 2.14). Many American women and some men bore holes into their earlobes to hang earrings.

Figure 2.14 Alterations of the human body. (a) Maori (New Zealand) facial tattoos, early twentieth century; (b) woman from Frankfurt, Germany, with tattoos and facial piercings; (c) Mangbetu (Democratic Republic of the Congo) woman with elongated head and monkey bone through her ear.

Source: Retained

The hole may be enlarged so that a plug can be inserted, or weights may be attached so that the earlobe will be stretched. Some societies pierce the lower lip and insert a round plate. People may also pierce their nose, eyebrow, lips, tongue, nipples, and even genitals. A socially conservative woman might pierce her ears to wear fashionable diamond earrings; her "rebellious child" might pierce her nose or eyebrow as a symbolic act of rebellion; a youth from the Amazon may have his ears pierced as part of a *coming-of-age ritual*.

Additionally, some societies see white teeth as resembling the teeth of animals. To create a boundary between humans and nonhuman animals, teeth may be knocked out, filed into various shapes, or colored, most often blackened. Other body parts can be removed, most frequently a finger joint. Even head shape can be symbolically modified—the bones of the skull in infants are quite pliable, and pressure on these bones will cause them to deform. Sometimes, such head deformation results unintentionally from various practices, such as the flattening of the back of the head in infants on cradleboards. In other societies, such as the Mayas, the heads of infants born into high social classes were deliberately bound to alter their shape, and a bead dangled between their eyes to make them cross-eyed.

Conclusion

Symbols are often based on specific episodes that are recounted in myths, and they represent a specific worldview. An example we discussed was the Tewa practice of beginning dances by emerging from a kiva to symbolize the emergence from under the earth at the beginning of the world.

Bloodletting was an important part of Maya religious rituals. The reason for this is found in the origin story as told in a document known as the *Popul Vuh*, a seventeenth-century book that recounts the history of the Mayas. In the *Popul Vuh,* we learn that the gods created people to have a kind of living creature who would worship them. As they prepared to create human beings, the gods said, "So now let's try to make a giver of praise, giver of respect, provider, nurturer."[22]

This reflects the worldview of the Mayas that a reciprocal relationship exists between the Maya people and their gods. The world was brought about by a sacrifice by the gods, but it will continue to exist only if the Mayas, in turn, sacrifice for the gods. The smoke produced by burning cloths soaked with blood provides nourishment to the gods.

In a similar way, the symbolism of the Christian cross is based on the story of the crucifixion of Jesus found in the Christian Bible. The symbol of the cross also expresses the Christian worldview—that the death of Jesus provides the opportunity for salvation:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
>
> (John 3:16)

Another example of the connection between symbol, myth, and worldview is the yin-yang symbol (Figure 2.15). This symbol is based on the Taoist worldview of the importance of

Figure 2.15 *Yin-yang*. According to Taoist belief, *yin* is the female element and *yang* is the male element in the universe.

Source: Retained

balance and harmony. The Taoists believe that there are two interacting forces in the universe, called *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* is the female element associated with coldness, darkness, softness, and the earth. *Yang* is the male element associated with warmth, light, hardness, and the heavens. The two elements are opposites but mutually dependent, and they need to be in equilibrium. *Yin* and *yang* are believed to be present in every aspect of the world. Yet each holds the seed of the other and expands and becomes the other.

In an ancient Chinese creation story, *yin* and *yang* were held together in a cosmic egg until the struggle of the opposing elements cracked the shell. A creature called P'an Ku took form inside the egg. P'an Ku is sometimes referred to as the child of *yin* and *yang* or as the giant of Chinese mythology. P'an Ku emerges from the egg and creates the world, in several versions fashioning the earth using an adze or a hammer and chisel. But the creation of the world is not complete until P'an Ku dies, whereupon his body gives rise to various elements. His skull becomes the dome of the sky, and his flesh becomes the soil of the earth. His bones become rock; his blood, rivers; his breath, the winds; and his eyes, the sun and the moon. The fleas and parasites on his body became the ancestors of modern human groups.

These connections between symbol, myth, and worldview will continue to be important as we add one more element to the mix: ritual. In the next chapter, we will discuss myths and the ways they are intimately connected with symbols, rituals, and worldviews.

Summary

A *symbol* is something that stands for something else. Symbols enable us to talk about things that are not immediately in front of us and to create our own realities. They are important elements in religious practice and religious rituals center on the manipulation of symbols.

Symbols can appear in many forms. Language is symbolic in nature because various speech sounds are used to create combinations that have meaning. Yet nothing of the referent is inherent in the sound or character combination—its meaning is part of a learned cultural tradition. Recitation of religious narratives is an important feature of religious practices. Religious ideas also can be expressed in art that may contain many symbolic elements. Much artistic representation is arbitrary in that the nature of the symbol does not always communicate its meaning. Some examples are the swastika, the pentagram, and the cross. Although an outsider might have difficulty understanding a piece of religious art, a member of that culture would have no such difficulty.

Time and space are also treated symbolically. Many units of time, such as our week and the cycles of Maya time, are arbitrary and provide time with deep meaning. Calendar systems exist as a way of symbolically organizing time and for scheduling periodic rituals. Space is also full of symbolic meaning, especially when mythological events are seen as occurring on the landscape. Such a sacred landscape is a part of the totemic system found among the Australian Aborigines.

Music and dance are important symbolic elements in religious rituals. Musical elements suggest emotions and have symbolic meanings. What is considered religious music in one community might not be in another. Dance, composed of music, movement, costume, masks, props, and sets, is often used to tell religious stories in societies where such stories are not written down. All of these elements—language, art, music, and dance—interact to provide rich religious experiences.

The human body is also a symbolic canvas and may include such things as tattooing, cicatrization, tooth removal or marking, and head shape modification as ways to symbolize and communicate an individual's identity.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 2.

Study questions

1. Choose a religious symbol with which you are familiar and describe its meaning. How is it arbitrary and multivocal? Would someone who is not familiar with the religious system understand the meanings of this symbol?
2. Why do calendrics matter? How does the division of time affect a community? Identify and describe two periodic rituals (religious or secular) that occur within your community.
3. Symbolism plays a role throughout the course of our lives. Take an opportunity to visit a local cemetery. What forms of religious symbolism can you find?
4. Color has meaning in all cultures. What are some of the social rules that determine the use of color in our society (e.g., a bride wears white, or a person never wears white after Labor Day)? Interview someone of another generation and see if they know the same social rules or different ones.
5. Many American sports organizations (professional and amateur) are identified with particular animals. For example, colleges and professional football teams are often associated with a mascot, usually some kind of animal. Why are those particular animals used and not others? When you go to a football or baseball game, what ritual activities revolve around the mascot animal? How does this differ from a totem?
6. Religious music is important across cultures. Visit the generic website at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_music and read more about diverse types of religious music, then choose one that is new to you and interests you and explore it in more

depth. How is this different from the music you might traditionally hear in a religious service with which you are familiar?

7. Do an analysis of a sacred space using either the three criteria of Mircea Eliade (threshold, axis mundi, imago mundi) or the phenomenological approach of Thomas Tweed (that the use of the space evokes its sacred meaning). Explain why and how this space is sacred.

Notes

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2 V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).
3 J. Church, *Language and the Discovery of Reality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 95.
4 C. Allen, *The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2002).
5 F.H. Cushing, *Zuñi: Selected Writings of Frank Hamilton Cushing*, edited with an introduction, by J. Green (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 198–199.
6 B. Wright, *Kachinas of the Zuni* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1985), p. 4.
7 Ibid., pp. 35–38.
8 Note: "Maya" references the cultures; "Mayan" refers to the 31 languages spoken by Mayas. A scholar specializing in Maya studies is called a "Mayanist."
9 A.F. Aveni, *Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).
10 M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1957), p. 11.
11 Some scholars question the authenticity of El Castillo as a calendar, or if the Maya architects intended to design hierophany into its construction. Archaeoastronomer James Aveni, among others, contends that El Castillo is a calendar and was intentionally designed to display hierophany. Notably, the pyramid sits on top of the roof of an underground cenote and is situated in the center of four other cenotes, including the Sacred Well of Sacrifice to the north. In addition, the hierophany lasts around five days, including the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. See V. Miller, "The Castillo-Sub at Chichén Itza: A Reconsideration." In *Landscapes of the Itza: Archaeology and Art History at Chichén Itza and Neighboring Sites*, L. Wren, C. Kristan-Graham, T. Nygard, and K. Spencer, eds. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), pp. 175–179.
12 For an interesting article on culture and color symbolism, see www.livescience.com/33523-color-symbolism-meanings.html and https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1196565
13 G.A. Reichard, *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 206.
14 T. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
15 M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, Pub., 1961).
16 We should note that not all scholars agree with this interpretation of the Maya calendar and its correlation with our calendar, so the actual date on our calendar may be off by a few days.
17 The correlation between the Julian and Gregorian calendars can vary by as much as two weeks.

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Chapter 3

Mythology

Myths are sacred narratives or stories of creation that provide the foundations for religious beliefs and practices. Myths tell of the origins and history of the world and the creation of the first human beings. They also prescribe the rules of proper conduct and articulate the ethical and moral principles of society. Some myths exist as written texts, and others are oral narratives. Myths also can be told or conveyed in all kinds of art and performance, including music and dance. In this chapter, we will discuss the nature of myths and provide examples from various religious traditions.

The nature of myths

As we learned in Chapter 1, all people use a cultural lens to impose meaning on their world. Culture provides a body of knowledge that serves to interpret and explain reality. However, people also experience things they cannot comprehend and cannot control. They ponder the origin of their world. They seek to understand the interconnectedness between humanity and the world around them, including the physical landscape, the plants and animals that dwell in this landscape, and other human beings and societies. And they question the existence and meaning of disaster, illness, and death.

Worldview

The way in which individuals in a society perceive and interpret their reality is known as their **worldview**. Their worldview provides them with an understanding of how the world works; it forms the template for thought and behavior and provides them with a basic understanding of the origin and nature of humankind and their relationship to the world around them.

To better understand the concept of worldview, we can compare the worldviews of two cultures, Navajo and non-Indigenous Judeo-Christians. Navajos today are the second-largest Native American group in the United States (Cherokees are the largest). They occupy a large reservation in Arizona and New Mexico, although today, many Navajos have left the reservation and live elsewhere.

To Navajos, humans are a part of nature. They see their world in terms of the relationships and connections that bind the various elements that make up the world. All of these

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elements—the land, the plants, the animals, the people, and the gods—are bound together into a systematic and balanced whole called *hozho*. All of the elements within the universe affect one another, existing in a state of harmony. For the universe to function—to maintain its harmonious state—people must properly behave as defined by Navajo culture. Failure to behave properly brings disharmony in the universe, and this disharmony can lead to natural disaster, illness, and even death. The goal of a Navajo is to remain in harmony with the universe or, as they like to put it, to "walk in beauty."

Whereas Navajos see humans as one element in the natural world, non-Indigenous Judeo-Christians often see their world quite differently—they see humans occupying a very special place in a more hierarchical universe. In Biblical Psalm 8, the author writes:

> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
>
> For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.
>
> Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet . . .

This psalm clearly expresses that the world was created for the benefit of humankind and that humankind has the authority and the right to exploit the natural world. This active relationship with nature is seen in attempts to control nature—through dams and irrigation projects, for example, and also through the ways we tend and care for our bodies. Whereas the contemporary Navajo might see illness as a manifestation of disharmony and attempt to bring resolution of illness through a ritual designed to re-establish harmony, the Judeo-Christian might primarily seek the observed cause of the illness through medical technologies.

Stories of the supernatural

People describe their world and express their worldview in stories and other creative expressions such as art, drama, jokes, graffiti, folk music, and festivals. The following is a well-known story that is European in origin and was first published in 1823, written down from oral tradition. It has been told and retold countless times.[1]

> The story of *Snow White* involves an evil queen who flies into a jealous rage when she learns that someone in the kingdom is more beautiful than she. She keeps tabs on her status in the beauty arena by using a talking mirror. This is a type of divination instrument (see Chapter 7) used to gather information about things and events in ways that are supernatural. (Talking mirrors do not exist in our empirical, natural world.)
>
> Snow White is the evil queen's stepdaughter. As Snow White matures, she eventually becomes more beautiful than the queen, who sees Snow White as a threat that must be eliminated. The queen orders Snow White to be killed, but the huntsman who is ordered to do the killing takes pity on Snow White and lets her escape into the forest. The huntsman then kills a wild boar and presents its lungs and liver to the queen as being Snow White's. The evil queen cooks and eats the lungs and liver, thinking them to be those

of her dead stepdaughter. (This is an example of ritual cannibalism.) Perhaps the queen believes that by eating the remains of her rival, the elements of beauty in Snow White will pass to her.

Thus, Snow White escapes and moves in with seven dwarfs. The evil queen, learning through her magic mirror that Snow White is still alive, finally kills her with a poisoned apple (Figure 3.1). After many years, Snow White is discovered by a prince who, on kissing her, brings her back to life.

Figure 3.1 An illustration on page 17 of Mjallhvít (Snow White), from an 1852 Icelandic translation of the Grimm-version fairytale.

Source: Wikimedia

When we read the story of *Snow White*, it is clearly a story told for entertainment, primarily for children. However, like many such stories, it also provides a *moral lesson*. In this case, we are told of the evils of envy and jealousy and what can happen to someone who exhibits these attributes. (In one early version of the story, the evil queen is invited to the wedding celebration of Snow White and the Prince. Her evil deeds are revealed, and she is made to put on a pair of red-hot iron slippers. She dances until she dies.)

Yet, although this story talks about moral issues and contains many supernatural elements (the magic mirror, for example), no one would classify it as a religious story. The dwarfs are not sacred; the mirror is not holy; the resurrection of the beautiful maiden does not elevate her to the status of deity. The story does not relate to the actions of any gods; it is not the basis for religious rituals; there are no churches or temples dedicated to Snow White. Adults do not believe the story of Snow White to be true.

Stories such as *Snow White* are meant to entertain; these are called **folktales**. Folktales take place in a fictional or imaginary world. They include supernatural elements and frequently contain a moral. Folktales usually exist independent of time and space. (Where was the kingdom in which Snow White lived located? How long ago did the story take place?) **Folklore** is the study of folktales, myths, and legends of world cultures.

In contrast to folktales, a **legend** is seen by members of the culture as representing events that have actually taken place, although some embellishment often occurs. Legends take place in the comparatively recent past and tell not only of such things as migrations, wars, heroes, and kings but also of local stories about buried treasure, ghosts, and saints. They may or may not include supernatural elements and may or may not be considered sacred. Legends you may be familiar with include the cities of Atlantis and El Dorado, the heroes Robin Hood and King Arthur, George Washington chopping down the cherry tree, and the story of the Holy Grail.

There are also Indigenous legends. Kiowa elders tell a humorous story about some men who walked far south into Mexico until they reached the rainforests of Chiapas, where they encountered a race of long-tailed people living in trees. When addressed in Kiowa, the people scurried away through the treetops, chattering unintelligibly. Discouraged by the rude people (howler monkeys), the travelers turned back towards home! This adventure probably occurred in the early-to-mid nineteenth century and later developed into a legend.

Legends are also commonplace in our contemporary world, although people seldom see them as such. Known as **urban legends**, these stories are recounted as having really happened, primarily on the Internet or in tabloids. Some commonly circulated urban legends are crocodiles living in the sewers of New York City and strangers giving out poisonous candy at Halloween.

Myths and religion

Myths are different from folktales and legends. **Myths** are sacred stories of creation that tell of the origin of the world and humankind, the existence and activities of gods and spirits, the creation of order in the universe, and the nature of illness and death. Myths relate the origins of human traditions and articulate a society's values and norms. They give instructions on how to behave and distinguish good from evil.

Myths also describe the beginning of the world after creation, including extraordinary events that affected people's ancestors. Myths describe tribal migrations and allude to ancestral homelands and connections to sacred landscapes. For example, Zunis believe they emerged from the Underworld through Ribbon Falls at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) peoples believe they first came out from the Underworld at a small promontory in Kamiah, Idaho, referred to as the "heart of the monster." These are Indigenous origin myths. Post-creation stories of clan migrations are connected to many of the Ancestral Puebloan ruins dotting the Four Corners area, including Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde.[2] Compared to legends, myths also tend to be much older historically.

Myths are thought by the people who tell them to recount real events that took place in the remote past in a world different from the one we live in now. Myths, however, are believed to be instructive and relevant to modern life, and are often recounted in religious rituals. They contain enduring social lessons and truths. Lauri Honko writes:

> The reenactment of a creative event, for example, the healing wrought by a god in the beginning of time, is the common aim of myth and ritual. In this way the event is transferred to the present and its result, i.e., the healing of a sick person, can be achieved once more here and now. In this way, too, the world order, which was created in the primeval era and which is reflected in myths, preserves its value as an exemplar and model for the people of today.[3]

There are alternative meanings of the word *myth*—any invented story, imaginary/fictitious thing, unproven collective belief—that do not apply to our studies of religion. Unfortunately, these definitions of the term *myth* are frequently used in our society in a negative sense to mean stories that are false; that is not the sense in which we use the term here.

Figure 3.2 Sacred cenote of sacrifice, Chichén Itzá, Yucatan, Mexico; less skeletal evidence was found in Maya cenotes than had been anticipated based on Maya myths.

Source: Photo courtesy of T. Lack

Oftentimes, assumptions about Indigenous cultures are based on unproven collective beliefs, the things that everybody knows are true but are really stereotypes. For instance, from the late Terminal Classic through the early colonial period, Mayas made pilgrimages to Chichén Itzá to throw people into the Well of Sacrifice, or Sacred Cenote—sinkholes created when limestone bedrock collapses, creating a well—to appease the rain god Chaac during times of drought (Figure 3.2). Since colonial times, images of Maya priests throwing vestal virgins into the sacrificial well have dominated literature and art. However, the cenote was dredged between 1904–1911 by Edward H. Thompson and treasure hunter Norman Scott in 1967–1968. Biological anthropologist Earnest Hooton examined 42 of the skeletons recovered from the cenote and determined that most individuals were boys younger than 20 years old, and the others were mostly men and a few women. This coincides with Maya practices of sacrificing warriors captured in battle and taking children from distant communities.[4] Thus, actual research dispelled a *myth*.

Anthropologists and folklorists use the term *myth* to refer to sacred religious stories believed by the people who tell them to be true. In this sense, the stories of the Bible are myths, as are the writings of the Qur'an.

This analytic distinction between different types of narratives is one that is also made by many cultural groups. For example, Trobriand Islanders distinguish between *kukwanebu* (fairy tales, fictional stories told after dark for amusement), *libwogwo* (legends, stories told to impart knowledge and believed to be true), and *liliu* (sacred stories told during the preparation for religious rituals). Hopis identify *navoiti* as "historical knowledge to which the speaker has a direct link," *tutavo* and *wuknavoti* as "theology and prophesy," and *tuuwutisi* as "historical knowledge that is either learned from another person or stories that non-Indians commonly label myths."[5] Many societies distinguish between true stories (myths and legends) and stories that are lies or jokes (folktales). The distinctions between folktales, legends, and myths are summarized in Table 3.1.

The nature of oral and written texts

Myths can be oral or written. In literate societies, written texts may form the basis of scholarly discourse and analysis as well as ritual. In nonliterate societies and many literate societies, texts are recited. Recitation is much more than a simple rote presentation

Table 3.1 Forms of narrative

Folktales	*Legends*	*Myths*
Regarded as fiction; not considered to be sacred; meant to entertain	Based on real people, places, or events and are considered to be factual	Regarded as fact; accepted on faith; source of authority on moral and ethical issues
Include supernatural elements, yet are secular	Include few supernatural elements; can be sacred or secular	Include a great many supernatural elements; considered to be sacred
Characters are human and/or nonhuman	Characters are generally human	Characters are human and nonhuman
Exist independent of time and place	Take place in the present or recent past; associated with the modern world	Take place in the remote past in another world or an earlier manifestation of today's world

of the text—recitation is *performance*. In reciting the text, a person might speak in a manner that is not found in everyday speech (Figure 3.3). Costumes, facial expressions, body postures, and changes in the quality of the voice all serve to create an experience. In some societies, we find specialists—actors and storytellers—who memorize and recite texts.

Figure 3.3 *Wayang* puppetry is a story-telling art form practiced in Indonesia; although the puppets are colorful and intricately designed, the performance itself occurs behind a translucent screen, and the story is performed through shadows; many *wayang* performances are based on well-known myths.

Source: Wikimedia

Oral texts are frequently very long and complex. They are not always recited as a single, complete narrative and might not even be seen as a single entity. Particular segments might be recited at certain times in particular circumstances. One of the consequences of the oral transmission of stories is that they are frequently unconsciously altered with each generation. As a result of this learning process, different versions of the same myth can exist in different families or groups within a society. For example, there are several versions of the Navajo creation story. Each was collected by a different anthropologist working with a different elder. Although they have much in common, there are major differences.

Oral tradition and the Shakers

Like religious groups before them, such as the Puritans and Quakers, the Shakers emigrated to the United States from England in search of religious freedom. Nine English men and women, members of what would become the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (also known as the Shakers), boarded the *Mariah*, a ship that had been deemed "unseaworthy" for the voyage. They were led by an Englishwoman named Ann Lee (she would later be known as Mother Ann by her followers). During the three-month voyage, they reportedly faced many hardships, including terrifying storms at sea and difficult relations with the ship's crew. The voyage lasted three months, and they arrived in New York Harbor on August 6, 1774. The stories of their passage and the founding of the first Shaker settlement in Watervliet, New York, were originally part of Shaker oral tradition passed from member to member. These were eventually collected and written down after Ann Lee's death. The "heroic passage" and the faith and endurance to survive are now an integral part of the identity of the Shakers, one of their foundational myths.

Jan Vansina, a Belgian historian, studied the differences between oral and literate traditions and noted three primary differences:

- **different relationships to time**: Oral traditions tend to be cyclical, with memory stored in repetitive formulas or patterns—here, you might see things such as myth *trilogies*, or a series of related myths. In Genesis, there are two accounts of creation (see Box 3.1), likely due to the origins of more than one creation story in ancient oral tradition. Written traditions—cultures using literacy as memory storage—tend to have a more analytical, linear historical format, with myths highlighted as foundational, singular events. They also tend to be more stable accounts over time, especially if they are not translated into other languages.
- **different relationships to audience**: Oral tradition cultures tend to remember and recite myths from multiple linguistic sources, using Indigenous languages and unique, specific details and cultural characteristics; written tradition cultures tend to record stories and events in a single language shared across populations and the accounts frequently have fewer specific details and unique cultural characteristics.
- **different relationships to action**: In oral cultures, the word itself is *transformative* and "magical," and speaking certain words *creates* an event or action (think about magical curses and blessings that were passed from person to person in oral traditions). Cultures that are primarily based on writing tend to be more *indexical*—the word is a placeholder that refers to ideas, concepts, and actions.[6] And because they are preserved in writing, written accounts do not vary and evolve the way oral ones do.

To better illustrate the differences, consider the following contrasts between an oral and written tradition. Notice the differences in how each tradition sees form, style, and tone.

Example of an oral text: Raymond Firth worked with the Tikopia of the Polynesia culture area. He recorded different versions of a myth about the building of the Rasofiroki Temple, a building that was thought to exist on both a material and spiritual plane.[7] The actual building that could be seen by humans was believed to have a prototype in the heavens that was built by a group of sibling gods. In a version recorded by Firth in 1929, the Great God, the oldest of the siblings, asks his brothers to hand up iron nails for the building of the temple. However, the brothers only hand up coconut husk and cord. When they finished,

the Great God came down, took the iron, and went off to the land of the White man. In a second version, the temple was built in England, and the senior brother calls out in English for his brothers to hand up the iron. His brothers cannot understand this foreign language, so they keep handing up coconut-based materials. When the building is done, the senior brother drives them away in disgust, and they go to Tikopia in a canoe. Iron was a relatively recent introduction to Tikopia, and the myth of the building of the temple appears to have changed not only to accommodate this new material but also to account for why the Europeans had this material but the Tikopians did not.

Example of a written text: An example of a written text is the stories in the Qur'an, which form the foundation of Islam.[8] Muslims believe that the Qur'an represents the word of God as revealed to Mohammad by the archangel Gabriel in the early seventh century. It was spoken to Mohammad and was initially handed down orally but was soon set down in written form. As the spoken word of God, verses from the Qur'an are recited and memorized by devout Muslims. Because the Qur'an was revealed to Mohammad in Arabic, it is learned and memorized in Arabic throughout the Islamic world. (Of course, translations of the Qur'an do exist, but they are not used in ritual. Commentaries on the Qur'an are made in the local language.) Because printing presses produce millions of copies of this text, all identical in content, the exact text is not only found throughout the world but is also transmitted unchanged generation after generation. For Muslims, this lack of change is particularly important. Muslims believe that the true text exists in heaven and was given to Mohammad through revelations, which he perfectly memorized word for word. Thus, the Qur'an (the word actually means "recitation") represents a perfect transcription of God's vision and should not change.

Genesis

Many written texts have their origins in oral narratives. For example, the Old Testament opens with two creation stories (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1 Genesis

Genesis (1:1–2:3) The first story recounted in Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 begins with the world covered with water ("And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"). God shapes the world over a period of six days, resting on the seventh. The order of creation of living things is plants, followed by animals, followed by male and female human beings together ("male and female created he them"). This story is from what biblical scholars call the P or priestly document. It was probably written before 586 BCE. It contains many parallels with the *Enuma elish*, a Mesopotamian myth, and establishes the origin and sacred importance of the Sabbath.

Genesis (2:4–2:10, 2:15–2:23) In the second story, Genesis 2:4–2:10 and 2:15–2:23, at the beginning of the story, the world is a desert ("for the Lord God had not

caused it to rain upon the earth"). God first "formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." He places a man called Adam in the Garden of Eden. God then forms all the animals and brings them to Adam one at a time to be named. Finally, God creates a woman called Eve from Adam's rib. This story comes from what is referred to as the J document. It was likely written earlier than the first story, sometime between 960 and 915 BCE.

The stories of Genesis are reflections of a Judeo-Christian worldview. They are patriarchal in many ways. For example, woman (Eve) is derived from man (Adam), and the deity is depicted as male. In many Western societies, men dominate women, and many positions of authority, such as the priesthood, are restricted to men. Here, the religious text acts as a **social charter** that explains the culture's view of the proper organization of human relationships.

Changes do occur in written texts, but they are usually deliberate changes that are the consequences of translation or scholarly discourse over the meaning of particular words and passages. In some religious traditions, such as Christianity, the text—the Bible—is usually found in a translated form to be read by any literate member of the community. This was not always true. In the Middle Ages (roughly 500–1500 CE), Catholicism as we know it today became standardized as a faith tradition. In the absence of a strong central government following the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Church became both a religious and a secular power. During this time, the Church was seen as the intermediary between humankind and God—God's message for people came to them through the Church. Very few people were literate, and the Bible was available only in Latin. This was not seen as a problem because the Church existed to interpret God's word. Later, the Protestant Reformation would emphasize the Bible, and not the Church, as the source for true Christianity. Among the central beliefs of Martin Luther, who in 1517 began the Reformation, was that laypeople should read the Bible for themselves. This meant that everyone needed to learn to read and also that the Bible had to be translated into the local languages.

Perhaps one of the most famous translations of the Bible was that ordered by King James I of England and published in 1611. The King James Version of the Bible is still widely used today. Many Bible scholars, however, note what they consider to be inaccurate translations of certain words and passages, resulting from the knowledge and political atmosphere of the early seventeenth century.

The King James Version is written in what is now an older form of English. Language changes over time, and written religious texts that do not change will, over time, appear to use words and phrases that are no longer a part of the spoken language. Religious texts are often written in a "religious" lexicon, using words and phrases not used in everyday speech. Some societies even have distinctive dialects or languages that are reserved for the recitation of religious narratives. For example, consider the excerpt from Psalm 8 that was presented at the beginning of this chapter: "When I consider thy heavens, the work

of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" Forms such as *thy, hast*, and *thou* were once commonly used words in English, but no longer. Today, their presence in a narrative often labels that narrative as being religious.

Many modern versions of the Bible exist today. These are attempts to create what are considered to be more accurate translations of the earliest extant versions of the Bible, written in modern language that is easier to read and understand by people today. Yet many people are uncomfortable with modern translations and retain the King James Version because it sounds more "religious." This resembles the special religious language forms reserved for religious narratives that are found in many societies. Interestingly, there are versions of the King James Bible that attempt to modernize the language yet retain the use of religious linguistic forms. (See Box 3.2 for a discussion of gender-neutral translations of the Bible.)

Box 3.2 Gender and the Christian Bible

Written texts often exist in multiple versions. Zondervan, the world's largest publisher of Bibles, has published over a dozen different translations. Some translations preserve more traditional language, such as *thou*, and others attempt to translate the Bible into a more modern language. One area of debate with regard to modern translations is the issue of gender. The language used in most Christian Bibles not only refers to God as male but also uses the masculine generic (e.g., saying *man* to mean both men and women). Some argue that this language is not inconsequential and, actually, both reflects and shapes the way that people think. Changing this language is seen as a way to address the outdated gender roles portrayed in the Bible and help achieve gender equality.

When Zondervan updated its *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) in 1990 as the *New Revised Standard Version*, it was met with much opposition from Christians who felt the changes were unnecessary and, in some cases, changed the meaning of the text. For example, compare the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) and *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) translations of John 14:23:

> Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.
>
> (RSV)

> "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them."
>
> (NRSV)

Critics argue that the new translation obscures the original meaning that Jesus and his Father would come to dwell with individual believers.

In other cases, the changes may seem unnecessary and may not make sense—for example, making the army of Israel gender-neutral (using the term "warriors" instead of "men of war") when it is historically accurate that the army was composed only of males. Similarly, critics see changing Paul's statement in Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:11) from "When I became a man, I gave up childish ways" to "When I became an adult" as unnecessary because Paul is, in fact, a man.

Further controversy erupted in the late 1990s when Zondervan announced that it was going to publish a new, more modern translation of the company's *New International Version*, which is second in sales only to the *King James Version*, still very similar to its original 1611 form. The *New International Version* (NIV) is popular with Evangelical Christians. The new version, called *Today's New International Version* (TNIV), also uses gender-neutral language. However, the changes made in the TNIV version only concerned human beings. Some felt that the changes did not go far enough because God is still referred to as masculine (e.g., Father) and not with neutral terms (e.g., parent).

In 2003, the Southern Baptist Convention commissioned its own translation of the Bible known as the Holman Christian Standard Bible (CSB), which initially retained a lot of the gendered language, but by 2016, a revision of the CSB began to show more gender-neutral terms. Part of the rationale for using more gender-neutral language in the later revision was that the original text did not necessarily exclude females in many instances where masculine language had been used—in some instances, words such as "man" (as in Psalm 8) were being used to refer to males and females. Where females did not appear to be excluded, the CSB chose to use more gender-neutral words.[9]

Obviously, there are many issues that shape this controversy. They include the degree to which language shapes thought and society, whether the masculine emphasis of the Bible was intended and should be preserved, and how accurately translations must reflect the original text. The debate is not merely about language but about the Christian worldview regarding gender issues in general.

Understanding myths

Myths exist in all human societies. They have been collected and analyzed by countless anthropologists, folklorists, and other scholars. Many different theoretical orientations are used as tools to study and explain myths. While myths show an astonishing degree of variability, certainly common themes occur that have become the focus of scholarly study. In this section, we will look at some approaches to the study of myths and survey some of the common themes.

Approaches to the analysis of myths

The analysis of myths can be approached from many different perspectives. Are myths literal or symbolic? If they are symbolic, how should these symbols be interpreted? How

are myths tied to the rest of culture? Do myths serve functions, and if so, which ones? Do myths reflect the way that the human mind works, the way a specific culture works, or both? Many different ways of analyzing religious narratives are based on the different theoretical approaches to the study of religion discussed in Chapter 1.

Searching for myth origins in the nineteenth century

The nineteenth-century evolutionary school in anthropology saw a unilineal progression from more "primitive" societies to more "civilized" ones. Accompanying this progression was a similar proposed progression from magic to religion to science. Myths were seen as belonging to the "primitive" period, with sacred myths being replaced by secular folktales until finally dying out altogether in "civilized" societies. (It is important to remember that anthropologists no longer believe in such an evolutionary progression or that cultures can be classified as "primitive" or "civilized.")

Theorists from the evolutionary school assumed that modern people living in small-scale societies lived and thought the same way that earlier European societies had. They compared myths found in many different cultures, looking for common elements from which they could reconstruct an assumed "original form" of myth from which all others had derived. It was believed that doing this could help explain puzzling aspects of modern European society.

The work of British anthropologist Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941) is a good example of this approach. He collected many examples of myths and magical practices from around the world and published them as a thirteen-volume work entitled *The Golden Bough* (1890). Although modern anthropologists criticize the information in *The Golden Bough* as taken out of its cultural context, the book is still widely read. As an example of the comparative approach, Frazer analyzed the story of the fall of man in Genesis by looking at other origin-of-death myths cross-culturally:

> The story of the Fall of Man in the third chapter of Genesis appears to be an abridged version of this savage myth. Little is wanted to complete its resemblance to the similar myths still told by savages in many parts of the world. The principal, almost the only, omission is the silence of the narrator as to the eating of the fruit of the tree of life by the serpent, and the consequent attainment of immortality by the reptile . . . If my interpretation of the story is right, it has been left for the comparative method, after thousands of years, to supply the blank in the ancient canvas, and to restore, in all their primitive crudity, the gay barbaric colours which the skilful hand of the Hebrew artist had softened or effaced.[10]

Since Frazer's time, further studies of myths have found that no single myth exists cross-culturally, but characteristic versions of a story may be found in specific areas. For example, in Africa, origin-of-death myths revolve around a failure to deliver a message, whereas among Native Americans, the story centers on a debate on the subject of death.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, a new approach to the study of myth was popular. This approach argued that myth is derived from earlier ritual practices. Based on this

idea, theorists tried to reconstruct these rituals. Of course, this approach is not a complete answer to the question of origins because if myth came from ritual, where did ritual come from? This approach to myth, however, did encourage scholars to look beyond the text for the connection that myths have to the cultures in which they are found. Most scholars today acknowledge that myth and ritual are closely related and parallel expressions, as opposed to believing that one is derived from the other.

Fieldwork and functional analysis

Early studies of myth and religion, such as those of Frazer, were undertaken by people who read myths collected by missionaries, travelers, and others from the comfort of their own libraries. This changed in the early twentieth century with a new emphasis on scientific study, ethnographic fieldwork, and participant observation by anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski.

The Father of American anthropology and an avid fieldworker, Franz Boas felt that mythology could be read almost like an autobiography written by the culture itself. Working with Indigenous informants and interpreters, Boas collected and transcribed many Native myths. He used myths as sources of ethnographic data about kinship systems, housing types, division of labor, hunting techniques, and other cultural traits.[11] Some of his students later challenged this approach; they felt that myths are more than just a literal reflection of what goes on in a culture. For example, in her study of Zuni mythology, Ruth Benedict noted that myths are often idealized descriptions of things that do not happen in real life.[12] However, Boas brought to the anthropological study of myth the importance of phonetically transcribing full texts and of relating myths to the rest of culture.

Like Boas, Malinowski favored a literal interpretation of myth. While neither anthropologist at this time favored the idea that myths could be purely symbolic, they both emphasized in-depth study of one culture at a time as opposed to comparing myths cross-culturally. Malinowski was a founder of the functional approach in anthropology, previously discussed in Chapter 1, which turned from the nineteenth-century interest in the origins of myth to a focus on how myths function in a culture. Malinowski wrote that myths are seen as a force to help maintain the society:

> Studied alive, myth, as we shall see, is not symbolic but a direct expression of its subject matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive cultures an indispensable function; it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficacy of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and wisdom.[13]

Malinowski conducted long-term fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands and described how the Islanders themselves distinguish between folktales, legends, and myths. Myths are not told for entertainment or to impart historical information but are used to justify and explain religious rituals as well as social and moral rules. For example, before the Trobriand annual feast of the return of the dead, myths are told that explain why humans die, why the spirits of the dead have to leave the village, and why they return once a year. Trobriand Islanders also engage in extensive ceremonial trading (called *kula*); the rules for such trade, the magic used to prepare canoes for the voyage, and even the geographical routes taken are all related to specific mythology.

Critics of the functional approach point out that it focuses only on benefits, not institutions or practices that may be oppressive or exploitative. Functionalism also focuses on consensus building, not, for example, the potential conflict caused by competing versions of a myth. Because of this emphasis on consensus and function, the approach does not deal well with cultural change.

Structural analysis of myth

Structural analysis, as the name implies, focuses on the underlying structure of the myth. This approach is based on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who pointed out that humans tend to think and categorize the world in common ways using terms of binary opposites, such as black and white, nature and culture.[14] Lévi-Strauss believed that the human brain, as a biological organ, was the same across cultures, and so *mythology*, the study of myths, was a window into universal forms of human cognition.

The division of the world into binary opposites can be seen cross-culturally in myths, such as the story of Genesis.[15] Examples of binary opposites in Genesis creation accounts are light/dark, day/night, heaven/earth, man/animal, and man/woman. Binary oppositions can be stated directly (both parts expressed in the myth) or implied (where one part points to another). In the following portion of Genesis 1:4–6, the binary opposites of light/dark as well as heaven/earth are clearly stated, while good/bad and divide/join are implied:

> And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
> And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Structural analysis focuses on the structure of religious narratives by analyzing the content. It demonstrates that stories that seem very different on the surface may have a similar underlying structure. We can also apply structural analysis to a story from the Gururumbas of New Guinea (Melanesia culture area). The primary binary opposition in Gururumba culture is that of nature versus culture. We can see this opposition being expressed in several ways in the Gururumba myth of the origin of women, told in Box 3.3.

Box 3.3 The Gururumba creation story

The story begins in the distant past when things were not as they are today. There were no villages, no pigs, and no women. One day, two brothers go into the forest to look for food. They come upon an eagle's nest in which they find eggs and food that the eagle parents have left. The brothers take the food for themselves. They return several times to do this until one time when one of the eggs hatches, and the first woman emerges. The boys take the woman back to their home, feed her, and she grows up.

Then, one day, the younger brother decides to try to have sex with the woman. However, he is unable to do so because she does not have a vagina. He asks his older brother what to do. His older brother takes a sugarcane (a symbolically male plant for the Gururumbas) and hurls it at the woman to make an opening, but she runs away. The younger brother chases her, but every time he catches on to her arm or leg, she turns into an animal and slips away. Finally, he is able to catch hold of her thumb and have sex with her.

The woman gives birth to a son and several daughters. Later, when the son is grown, he asks his father if he can accompany him into the forest, but the father says no. The boy becomes very upset and jumps into the river and becomes a fish. The father does not know what to do, but the brothers see smoke coming from the forest (which means a wise old man lives there). This man comes and uses magic to change the fish back into a boy. The father is so happy that he builds the first men's house and puts his son inside to make him a man. When the son emerges from the men's house, pigs spring from the ground. The boy later notices smoke coming from the grasslands and realizes that there are other men out there who have no women and no pigs. So, he gives each of his sisters a pig and sends them to the other men, beginning an exchange relationship.

Source: As told by Philip Newman, lecture at UCLA (1990)

In this myth, we see various direct and implied binary oppositions such as distant past/today; human/animal; male/female; inside/outside; food/hunger; chase/catch; sex-reproduction/loss-death; family/community. The myth emphasizes that the nature versus culture dichotomy is related to the differences between the sexes. Women are part of nature, whereas men are associated with culture. The origin of the first woman from an egg and her various reversions to animal forms when she is pursued clearly associate women with nature. The wild female is only culturally transformed through human (male) sexual agency. The sugarcane is a symbolically male plant used to change the biologically

unproductive woman into a culturally productive wife. Her son is the first male born of a female, thus not fully cultural, as can be seen when he turns into a fish. He is not a complete adult, both biologically and socially, until his final transformation in the men's house. The boy himself then becomes a *transformer*, changing his sisters into wives and other men into social allies, thereby establishing a community (society).

Critics of structuralism argue that it is a sterile approach to the study of religious narrative and that it cannot be empirically tested but must be accepted, to some extent, "on faith." While a structural analysis can extricate or reveal meaning in myths, the question remains—does the anthropologist's perspective (etic) align with that of the people who believe in the myth (emic)? Lévi-Strauss believed that these perspectives did not need to be aligned with each other, but critics of structuralism disagree. Regardless, as you proceed through the chapter reading diverse myths from across cultures, consider the binary oppositions that are openly expressed. Do they reveal anything "deeper" about the myth?

Psychological symbols in myth

Another approach to the analysis of myths interprets them as symbolic and sees this symbolism as rooted in human psychology. This approach is based on the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

Freud described various psychological defense mechanisms, such as *projection*, in which one's own unconscious attribute is perceived and reacted to by another person or thing.[16] For example, Freud saw individual dreams as symbolically expressing unconscious wishes and a similar process occurring with myths for groups. Myths are, therefore, a type of "shared dream." Freud also emphasized the importance of early childhood experiences, such as the nature of the parent-child relationship. He then proposed a relationship between early experiences and adult projection systems such as myth. Although such processes as projection and symbolism were considered universal, the actual symbolic content would be expected to vary as childhood conditions varied.

The narrative most associated with the psychoanalytic approach is the Greek story of Oedipus, the man who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. Freud argued that this story represents a deep psychological conflict experienced by all boys. Because he considered this case reflective of universal developmental issues, he expected similar stories to be found cross-culturally. In fact, Allen Johnson and Douglas Price-Williams, in their research, have found Oedipus-type stories from cultures around the world.[17]

Similar to Freud in its emphasis on human psychological processes is the work of Carl Jung.[18] In contrast to Freud, Jung felt that myths stemmed from something beyond the individual unconscious. Just as individuals have an unconscious mind, Jung believed that humans as a group share a **collective unconscious**, inborn elements of the unconscious that are manifested in dreams and myths. The main characters of these dreams and myths are termed **archetypes**. Oedipus is just one example of

an archetype; other archetypal characters include Trickster, Hero, Orphan, Seeker, Destroyer, Creator, Sage, and the Fool. Another example is the Phoenix, taken from the Greek story of the bird that rises from its own ashes. The Phoenix is a story of rebirth. A familiar telling of the Phoenix archetype is found in Christianity's death and rebirth of Jesus Christ.

In part, because Jung's archetypes are alleged to be universal and precultural, he has received less attention in anthropological circles than Freud, whose theories are more amenable to cultural relativism. Anthropologists have also criticized Jungian analysis for rarely using data from non-Western sources.

Common themes in myths

As we can see from the preceding discussion, underlying the diversity of narratives found cross-culturally are some common elements and themes. These similarities have been explained in various ways. Diffusion, or the spread of cultural traits from one group to another, is always a possible explanation. Others focus on the shared nature of human cognition and psychology. The ideas of Freud and Jung are good examples of this approach, although Freud saw the similarities stemming from shared individual experiences, whereas Jung focused on a universally shared collective unconscious. In this section, we will explore some of the common stories that are found in religious narratives around the world.

Origin myths

Origin myths answer some of the most basic human questions: Who are we? How did the world get to be the way it is? Why are we here? What is our relationship to the world? **Origin myths** address the foundations of many natural and social processes in our world—how life itself began or the origins of certain groups or clans. There are several types of origin myths. **Creation myths**, a form of origin myths that explains how the world as we know it began, are generally the most sacred of the religious narratives and address questions of identity, both personal and communal. Creation myths address the beginnings of a particular worldview of a specific group of people. All other narratives ultimately build on the groundwork laid down in creation myths.

A common element in origin stories is the birth metaphor. When the supernatural power doing the creating is female, this

Emergence myths
One of the best-known emergence myths is *Diné Bahane'*, the Navajo creation story (see Box 3.4). The early part of the story takes place under the earth, where there are four worlds, one on top of the other. The story begins in the first world, the bottom-most world, and then progresses upward. Usually, some danger or destructive power forces the creatures to escape through a hole in the sky into the next world.

In the fourth world are the four Holy People, immortal beings who travel on the rainbow following the path of the sunray; they can control winds and thunder. The Holy People then create the first humans, First Man and First Woman, from ears of corn. (Corn, cornmeal, and corn pollen play important roles in Navajo rituals.) The life force comes from the wind, which is likened to a person's breath. To hear a Navajo storyteller tell this story, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu9d3QGPLfU.

is generally a spontaneous and independent birth. When the supernatural power is male, the birth is more symbolic: the god vomits or excretes the world or perhaps sacrifices part of his own body to make the world. In the following origin story from the Bushongos, a Bantu people from Zaire (Guinea Coast culture area), the male deity vomits the world:

> In the beginning, in the dark, there was nothing but water. And Bumba was alone. One day Bumba was in terrible pain. He retched and strained and vomited up the sun. After that light spread over everything. The heat of the sun dried up the water until the black edges of the world began to show. Black sandbanks and reefs could be seen. But there were no living things. Bumba vomited up the moon and then the stars, and after that the night had its own light also. Still Bumba was in pain. He strained again and nine living creatures came forth [a leopard, crested eagle, crocodile, fish, tortoise, lightning, white heron, beetle, and a goat]. Last of all came forth men.[19]

Many origin myths begin with creation out of chaos, darkness, or the void. The following story is from the Yorubas, a society in West Africa (Guinea Coast culture area):

> In the beginning the world was a watery, formless Chaos that was neither sea nor land, but a marshy waste. Above it, in the sky, lived the Supreme Being, Olorun, attended to by other gods, including Orisha Nla, called the Great God. Olorun called Orisha Nla into his presence and ordered him to make a world. It was time to make a solid land and Orisha Nla was given a snail full of magic earth, a pigeon, and a five-toed hen to accomplish the assignment. Orisha Nla came down to the Chaos and set to work organizing it. He threw magic earth into a small patch. The pigeon and the hen began to scratch in the magic earth, and they scratched until land and sea were entirely separated . . . Orisha Nla was sent back to earth to plant trees, including the first oil palm. Olorun made the rain fall from heaven to water the seeds, which grew into a great forest. In heaven, Olorun began to make the first people. They were fashioned from earth by Orisha Nla, but only Olorun, the Supreme Being, could give them life. Orisha Nla hid in Olorun's workshop to watch. However, Olorun knew that Orisha Nla was hiding there and put him into a deep sleep, and so only Olorun knows the secret of how to bring a body to life. To this day Orisha Nla, through the agency of parents, makes the body, but only the Supreme Being can give it life.[20]

Because of the process of diffusion, certain culture areas share narrative elements in common. One example of this is the primordial egg as an element of creation stories in Asia, as seen in one Chinese origin story:

> At first there was nothing. Time passed and nothing became something. Time passed and something split into two: the two were male and female. These two produced two more, and these two produced P'an Ku, the first being, the Great Man, the Creator. First there was the great cosmic egg. Inside the egg was Chaos, and floating in Chaos was

> P'an Ku, the Undeveloped, the divine Embryo. And P'an Ku burst out of the egg, four times larger than any man today, with an adze (or a hammer and chisel) with which he fashioned the world.[21]

Another example of an origin myth is the **emergence myth**, which is common throughout North America. The initial acts of creation take place under the earth, which is often organized into a series of layers. The lower layers are dark and cramped. As the story progresses, it moves up from one world to the next. This movement is an evolutionary progression as acts of creation occur, and knowledge is imparted to various creatures, including humans. Finally, they emerge onto the surface of the earth.

There are some variations of emergence myths—sometimes, the emergence can be from inside another living body. The Nez Perce myth, *tim'né-pe* (The Heart of the Monster), tells the story of a large monster who was terrifying the earth, eating all the people and animals. Determined to be a culture hero, trickster god *Iceye'ye* taunted the Monster so that he would eat him, too. Once inside the Monster's belly, *Iceye'ye* took his flint and built a fire, cutting at the Monster's heart until he killed him. At death, the Monster's bodily orifices all opened and out flooded all the animals and the various Indigenous peoples, each from a different part of the Monster's body. Once he was finished, *Iceye'ye* looked around and realized, though, that he had not created anyone to live in *that* place where the Monster had been! And so he washed his hands and used the remaining bits and pieces to create the Nimiipuu, the Nez Perce, a "small but mighty people" of the Plateau culture area (Figure 3.4).[22] (Listen to the Nez Perce tell their story of the Heart of the Monster at www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x5PwxAKMHM.)

Figure 3.4 Nez Perce National Historic Site, Heart of the Monster, Kamiah, Idaho; the Nimiipuu believe that their ancestors emerged onto earth from this small knoll.

Source: Wikimedia

There are several explanations for emergence myths. The world under the surface of the earth can be seen as the womb in which creation occurs and the emergence onto the earth as a birth. The myth can also be seen as a reflection of the life cycle of a plant such as maize (corn) that begins as a seed under the ground and then emerges onto the surface of the earth.

Box 3.4 presents the section of *Diné Bahane'* in which we read about this creation.

Box 3.4 The Navajo creation story: Diné Bahane'

As for the gods, they repeated their visit four days in a row. But on the fourth day, *Bits'íís lizhin* the Black Body remained after the other three departed. And when he was alone with the onlookers, he spoke to them in their own language. This is what he said:

"You do not seem to understand the Holy People," he said.

"So I will explain what they want you to know.

"They want more people to be created in this world. But they want intelligent people, created in their likeness, not in yours.

"You have bodies like theirs, true enough.

"But you have the teeth of beasts! You have the mouths of beasts! You have the feet of beasts! You have the claws of beasts!

"The new creatures are to have hands like ours. They are to have feet like ours. They are to have mouths like ours and teeth like ours. They must learn to think ahead, as we do.

"What is more, you are unclean!

"You smell bad.

"So you are instructed to cleanse yourselves before we return twelve days from now."

That is what *Bits'íís lizhin* the Black Body said to the insect people who had emerged from the first world to the second, from the second world to the third, and from the third world to the fourth world where they now lived.

Accordingly, on the morning of the twelfth day the people bathed carefully. The women dried themselves with yellow corn meal. The men dried themselves with white corn meal.

Soon after they had bathed, they heard the distant voice coming from far in the east.

They listened and waited as before, listened and waited. Until soon they heard the voice as before, nearer and louder this time. They continued to listen and wait, listen and wait, until they heard the voice a third time as before, all the nearer and all the louder.

Continuing to listen as before, they heard the voice again, even louder than the last time, and so close now that it seemed directly upon them, exactly as it had seemed before. And as before they found themselves standing among the same four *Haashch'ééh dine'é*, or Holy People as *Bilagáana* the White Man might wish to call them.

Bits'íís doot l'izh the Blue Body and *Bits'íís lizhin* the Black Body each carried a sacred buckskin. *Bits'íís ligaii* the White Body carried two ears of corn.

One ear of corn was yellow. The other ear was white. Each ear was completely covered at the end with grains, just as sacred ears of corn are covered in our own world now.

Proceeding silently, the gods laid one buckskin on the ground, careful that its head faced the west. Upon this skin they placed the two ears of corn, being just as careful that the tips of each pointed east. Over the corn they spread the other buckskin, making sure that its head faced east.

Under the white ear they put the feather of a white eagle.

And under the yellow ear they put the feather of a yellow eagle.

Then they told the onlooking people to stand at a distance.

So that the wind could enter.

Then from the east *Nilch'i ligai* the White Wind blew between the buckskins. And while the wind thus blew, each of the Holy People came and walked four times around the objects they had placed so carefully on the ground.

As they walked, the eagle feathers, whose tips protruded slightly from between the two buckskins, moved slightly.

Just slightly.

So that only those who watched carefully were able to notice.

And when the Holy People had finished walking, they lifted the topmost buckskin.

And lo! the ears of corn had disappeared.

In their place there lay a man and there lay a woman.

The white ear of corn had been transformed into our most ancient male ancestor. And the yellow ear of corn had been transformed into our most ancient female ancestor.

It was the wind that had given them life: the very wind that gives us our breath as we go about our daily affairs here in the world we ourselves live in.

When this wind ceases to blow inside of us, we become speechless. Then we die.

In the skin at the tips of our fingers we can see the trail of that life-giving wind.

Look carefully at your own fingertips.

There you will see where the wind blew when it created your most ancient ancestors out of two ears of corn, it is said.

Source: Republished with permission of the University of New Mexico Press, from *Diné Bahane': The Navajo Creation Story* by Paul G. Zolbrod, 1984; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

Finally, the **earth diver myth** variant is a creation myth with Old World parallels in Europe and Asia. It is commonly found in North America, except in the Southwest and Arctic. At the beginning of time, a primordial body of water covers the land. Various creatures—turtles, crawfish, ducks, muskrats—take turns descending to far depths to find the bottom. Then, returning to the surface nearly drowned, this inauspicious creature produces the small portion of mud from which solid land is formed. Oftentimes, a creator figure shapes land from the mud. A motif found within the earth diver story is the occurrence of a world flood.

In Mesoamerica, earth diver creation stories are well known in Maya cultures and in the Central Highlands of Mexico. Creation occurred when the earth and mountains rose from the primordial sea. In the Quiché Maya variant, the gods Tepeu and Gucumatz utilized speech to create the mountains and earth that rose from the sea. This is the first of multiple creations, a common Mesoamerican theme. A crocodile represents the primordial earth, a "nascent landmass" floating on the sea. Aztecs perceived the crocodile's back as the "peaks and valleys" of the earth's surface, and Mayas recognized the crocodile as the surface of the earth and named a god Itzam Earth Crocodile.

Apocalyptic myths

Many myths found across cultures tell of the catastrophic destruction of the world, an apocalypse. The destruction takes many forms, one of which is by flood. A disciple of Freud once explained this as related to dreams that happen when a person has a full bladder. An alternative explanation lies in the fact that floods are likely to be frequently experienced, as people need to live near a water source. The Judeo-Christian flood myth is the story of Noah's ark, in which God sends the flood to rid the earth of the wickedness of man.

In many societies, we see a myth cycle of creations and destructions, called **apocalyptic myths**. The ancient Aztecs of Mexico tell of four worlds that existed prior to the present world, the fifth world. The following story tells of the destruction of the fourth world:

> During the era of the fourth sun, the Sun of Water, the people grew very wicked and ignored the worship of the gods. The gods became angry and Tlaloc, the god of rains, announced that he was going to destroy the world with a flood. However, Tlaloc was fond of a devout couple, Tata and Nena, and he warned them of the flood. He instructed them to hollow out a great log and take two ears of corn—one for each of them—and eat nothing more.
>
> So, Tata and Nena entered the tree trunk with the two ears of corn, and it began to rain. When the rains subsided and Tata and Nena's log landed on dry land, they were so happy that they caught a fish and ate it, contrary to the orders of Tlaloc. It was only after their stomachs were full that they remembered Tlaloc's command.
>
> Tlaloc then appeared to them and said, "This is how I am repaid for saving your lives?" They were then changed into dogs. It was at this point, where even the most righteous people were disobedient, that the gods destroyed the world, ushering in the present era of the Fifth Sun.[23]

While the previous examples are of apocalyptic floods that took place in the mythological past, not all apocalypses involve floods, and some involve predictions of future events. A good example comes from the New Testament in the Book of Revelations (21:1–9). Revelations focuses on a coming battle, both earthly and spiritual, between the forces of good and evil. The myth tells us that the "Lamb" of God (believed by most to be Jesus Christ) will save his people from a time of great tribulations on earth, destroy the wicked, and usher in an age of peace in which his people will live in the presence of God and Christ in a heavenly city.

> And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.
>
> And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
>
> And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.
>
> And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.
>
> And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.
>
> And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.
>
> He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.
>
> But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.
>
> And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Much of the symbolism and story of Revelations is familiar to Americans even if they are unfamiliar with the source, including the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the lamb of God, the seven seals, the beast, the harlot of Babylon, Satan, and the lake of fire. As we will see in Chapter 12, Revelations is the basis for many new religious movements as individuals interpret modern-day happenings as being those foretold in the myth.

Hero myths

Joseph Campbell (1904–1987), a scholar/writer of comparative religion and mythology, described the story of the hero's journey in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). The title refers to the fact that although there are thousands of different **hero myths** or stories involving heroes throughout the world, they all follow the same basic

storyline, what Campbell calls the **monomyth**. Campbell describes the monomyth as follows:

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.[24]

The hero's journey is a common theme encountered in many myths. Sometimes, the hero is based on a real person whose story has been idealized. Other times, the hero has no basis in real life. The first stage of the hero's journey is the *departure*. The hero, frequently an orphaned youth, is thrust out of his or her community for one of several reasons, such as the destruction of his or her home by some supernatural force. The second phase, *initiation*, includes the hero's training, as he or she learns to utilize supernatural tools, such as a sacred sword, under the direction of a master, who frequently possesses supernatural power. In the third phase, the *return*, the hero returns and accomplishes the task. The monomyth is frequently found in origin stories, where the hero is responsible for bringing some knowledge to humans.

Monomyths exist throughout Native North America. Since death cycles into life in foraging myths, the death of the mother transforms the story into the creation of the Half Boys, or Hero Twins, a story found among tribes of the Plains culture area. A common theme in foraging societies is a "full" universe; when a person or animal dies, another is born to replace them. After the death of his mother, the orphaned boy roams the prairies until he encounters a lone tipi, which is briefly vacated by its occupant, Spider Woman. She eventually returns and uses her transformer powers to capture the boy and put him to sleep with a lullaby. Spider Woman raises the boy and one day presents him with a gaming wheel shaped like a spider web, along with explicit instructions never to toss the wheel upward. Ignoring her request, he tosses the wheel high in the air, and it comes down with great force on his forehead, splitting him into two identical twins, the Half Boys. Spider Woman and the Hero Twin motifs also exist in some Pueblo cultures.

Various Kiowa stories attribute certain exploits to the Split Boys following their appearance. One tale relates that the twins reanimate their mother, who marries the younger twin, whereas the eldest weds Spider Woman (see Figure 3.5): the original

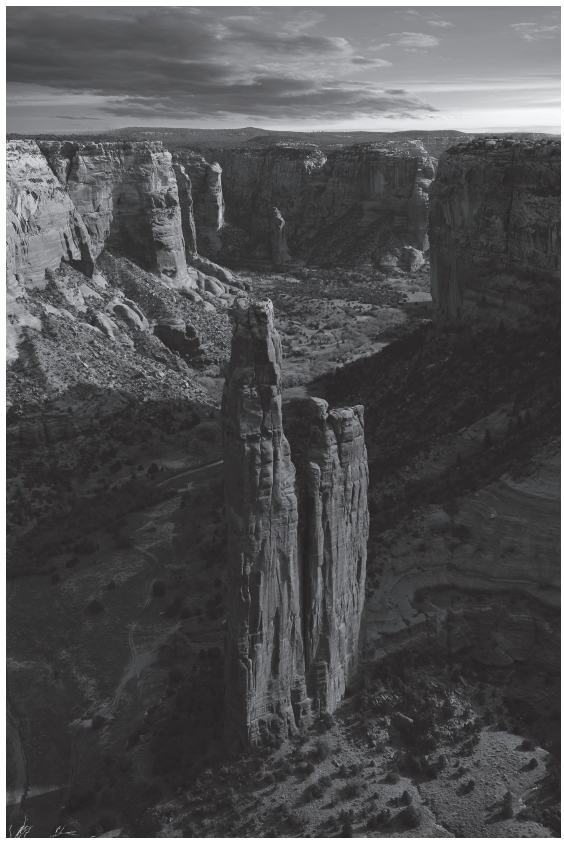

Figure 3.5 Spider Woman as a Creator God is found across several Indigenous groups. For Navajos, the landform at the center of this photo, Spider Rock at Canyon de Chelly, is the home of Spider Woman, who is revered for weaving together the universe and teaching Navajos how to weave.

Source: Wikimedia

Kiowas descended from the two couplings. A more popular story recounts that the Split Boys wander the earth, slaying monsters and overpowering evil forces, and then one day reappear at Spider Woman's lodge, where they confront and kill a snake, her husband. Finally, the twins separate: one travels east and transmutes into trees, mountains, and rivers, and the other journeys west and disappears forever. In James Mooney's version, one twin walks into a lake, never to be seen again, whereas the other transforms himself into the ten boy medicines or *Zaidethali* "Split Boy" bundles. Hence, the origin of the sacred *Thali-da-i* "Boy Medicines" is commonly referred to as the Ten Medicines.[25]

Entire religious systems may be based on a hero story. Buddhism is based on the story of Prince Siddhartha Gautama. Gautama leads a very sheltered life in his father's palace until he becomes aware of sickness, suffering, and death and the fact that he, too, is subject to them. He leaves behind his worldly possessions and spends years wandering, fasting, and meditating. He learns all he can from various teachers, but nothing seems to appease his sorrow and emptiness. In desperation, he resolves to sit under a Bodhi tree until he finds the answers he has been seeking. He is attacked by Kama-Mara, the god of love and death, but is victorious. During his time under the tree, Gautama gained knowledge and enlightenment and is thereafter referred to as the Buddha or the "Enlightened One."

Table 3.2 The monomyth in cinema: a sampling of common features

	The Wizard of Oz (1939)	*Star Wars (1977)*	*Harry Potter (2001)*
Hero	Dorothy Gale	Luke Skywalker	Harry Potter
Remote childhood	Lives with aunt and uncle in arid Kansas	Lives with aunt and uncle on arid Tatooine	Lives with aunt and uncle; unaware that his parents had magical powers
Call to adventure	Follows Toto fleeing witch	Follows R2D2 fleeing Empire	Invited to attend Hogwarts
Introduction of the helper	Good Witch	Ben Kenobi	Dumbledore
Given amulet	Red shoes	Lightsaber	Wizard's wand
Physical transportation out of previous life	Tornado	Mos Eisely Spaceport on Millennium Falcon	Train to Hogwarts
Enters Land of Enchantment	Oz and witch's castle	Death Star	Hogwarts Academy
Companions	Scarecrow, Tin Woodman, Cowardly Lion	Han Solo, C3PO, Chewbacca	Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley
Faces challenges	Wizard makes impossible demands	Freeing Princess Leia	Three-headed dog, Devil's snare plant, winged keys, etc.
Uses magic to accomplish goal	Dorothy uses red shoes to return to Kansas	Luke uses the Force to destroy Death Star	Harry uses magic to defeat Voldemort

The same monomyth structure is also frequently used in popular films, such as *Star Wars, The Wizard of Oz, The Matrix, The Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Table 3.2 compares some elements that are common to some of these movies.

Conclusion

The most fundamental questions asked by human beings—about the nature of life, existence, and death—are answered in the religious mythology we tell. These stories both explain and structure the world of a particular group of people. By examining religious myths, we learn much about a specific group's worldview, including rules for moral behavior. Myths are stories to live by. They create networks of meaning that affect the lives of people in that culture far beyond the domain of religion.

As we explore other topics in the study of religion, we will frequently return to the issue of religious narratives because these stories often form the foundation of religious practices.

Summary

How a society perceives and interprets its reality is known as its *worldview*. The worldview provides an understanding of how the world works; it forms the template for thought and behavior and provides a basic understanding of the origin and nature of humankind and its relationship to the world. People express their worldviews in stories.

Myths are sacred stories that tell of the origin of the world and humankind, the existence and activities of gods and spirits, the origin of human traditions, and the nature of illness and death. They tell us how to behave and how to distinguish good from evil. Myths are thought to recount real historical events that took place in the remote past. They provide the basis for religious beliefs and practices.

Myths can be both written and oral. Written forms tend to be very stable through time, and changes that do occur are usually deliberate changes that are the consequences of translation or scholarly discourse about the meaning of particular words and passages. Oral texts are recited, and this recitation often has the characteristics of performance. One of the consequences of the oral transmission of stories is that they are frequently unconsciously altered with each generation, which explains the existence of different versions of the same myth within a society.

There are many ways of interpreting myths. *Functional analysis* sees myths as forces that help to maintain a society. *Structural analysis* focuses on the underlying structure of myths. The *psychoanalytic approach* sees myths as symbolically expressing unconscious wishes.

Certain basic themes are common throughout the world. *Origin myths* provide answers to the questions: Who are we? Why are we here? What is our relationship to the world? These stories play an important role in laying out the culture's worldview. One common element is the birth metaphor, in which the world is born from a god or goddess or by creation out of chaos, darkness, or the void. *Apocalyptic myths* tell of the past or future

destruction of the world. *Hero myths* are stories about cultural heroes who, through knowledge and mastery of certain skills, are able to bring about marvelous results.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 3.

Study questions

1. A society's worldview is the way it perceives and interprets its reality. Often, this worldview is shaped by religious beliefs and values. Compare the creation stories of the Judeo-Christian religion (Box 3.1) and the Navajos (Box 3.4). How might the worldviews differ between these two populations based on their different creation stories?
2. In our society, a religious organization might set up a table on a college campus and distribute copies of the Bible. In a small-scale society, a storyteller might set up a "stage" at a local market and offer to tell stories. How are these two activities similar, and how are they different? How does the transmission of religious stories differ in these two societies?
3. What are the different theoretical approaches to the study of mythology? Choose one of the myths discussed in the chapter and apply two different theoretical lenses to interpret it. Does it change the meanings within the myth?
4. Why do we label the movies *Star Wars, The Wizard of Oz, The Matrix, The Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* monomyths? What are some other movies or television shows that are monomyths?
5. How do apocalyptic myths serve as social charters for a society? Consider what we learned about socialization and enculturation in Chapter 1. What role does apocalyptic myth play in teaching individuals about their culture?
6. Why do you think that commonalities exist in myths found in different cultures?

Notes

1 This is a brief synopsis of the story of *Snow White* as retold by the authors. While the story has been retold and changed over the decades, some of the most fascinating elements of the story have been eliminated from recent versions. We encourage you to read some of the earlier versions that include diverse elements.

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18 C. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, reprint ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).
19 Brief quote from *Primal Myths: Creating the World* by B.C. Sproul, © 1979 Barbara C. Sproul, p. 44. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.
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21 Brief quote from page 201 from *Primal Myths: Creating the World* by B.C. Sproul, © 1979 Barbara C. Sproul. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.
22 This myth is summarized and re-told based on the version found at www.nps.gov/nepe/learn/historyculture/heart-of-the-monster-history.htm#:~:text
23 Excerpt from *Parallel Myths* by J.F. Bierlein, copyright © 1994 by J.F. Bierlein. Used by permission of Ballantine Books, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
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Chapter 4

Ritual

The alarm clock rings. You reluctantly jump out of bed and begin your morning routine, which might include showering, shaving or putting on makeup, and eating breakfast. You probably do the same things in the same order day after day—or at least on weekdays. This patterned, recurring sequence of events may be termed a secular **ritual**.

The term *ritual* can refer to any repetitive sequence of acts. Psychologists use the term when referring to repetitive compulsive activity, such as the ritual of washing one's hands dozens of times a day. A class might begin with the ritual of roll call and announcements. However, when the ritual involves the manipulation of religious symbols such as prayers, offerings, and reading of sacred literature, we call it a **religious ritual**.

Sacred symbols are observed and manipulated in religious rituals, which helps individuals relate to what is sacred. According to anthropologist Sherry Ortner, rituals represent the merging of motivation and the general worldview and conception of the universe. Cross-culturally, most societies have major religious rituals where "the people see themselves as embodying in some way the essence of their culture, as dramatizing the basic myths and visions of reality, the basic values and moral truths, upon which they feel their world rests."[1]

Religious rituals often function as "religion in action" that attempt to offer solutions to cultural problems, particularly since the world is full of pain and suffering (chaos), and people desire to have stability and control in their lives. "The symbols of the rituals . . . lead us toward discovery of structural conflict, contradiction, and stress in the wider social and cultural world."[2] Therefore, understanding the rituals or cultural performances of a particular society provides the outside observer with a "blueprint" or model that helps describe the religious **ethos** (values) of that culture.

Diverse, religious values imparted through rituals are part of all cultures. Many times, these values involve our connections to other individuals. For years, Kiowa women have gathered for prayer meetings; these "prayer warriors" come together once or twice a month to pray for the community and the nation. Prayers are offered on behalf of soldiers serving in the military, individuals with drug and alcohol addictions, and those suffering from illnesses or family problems.

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The basics of ritual performance

In some ways, a public religious ritual resembles a play—it consists of actors (shamans and priests, for example), words (perhaps a prayer, a spell, or a sermon), sets (such as an altar), props (such as candles, religious books, or masks), and a society's worldview. It may contain music and dance as well. Smaller-scale rituals, such as those performed by a shaman or healer, may also have many of these elements. Although ritual can be an important form of entertainment within a society, its primary purpose is to instruct and create a social bond among the participants. The audience in a ritual is an active participant.

Two of the most basic elements in religious practices are ritual and myth, and the two are often closely connected. Ritual is often based on myth in that the directive to perform the ritual may lie within the myth. The myth often provides the context for the ritual and may be reflected in ritual. Other rituals are re-enactments of myth.

A society's mythology consists of stories that reflect the underlying worldview of the society. Although few people in a community can articulate the basic themes and underpinnings of their religious system in a philosophical or theological manner, people will be familiar with the religious truths expressed through their myths and rituals.

Many rituals, though by no means all, are public rituals in which an entire community is involved to some degree. Ritual activities symbolize the particular beliefs and values of that community. A ritual is a vehicle by which basic ideas, such as the definition of good and evil and the proper nature of social relationships, are imparted to the group.

Unlike other forms of discourse—reading this book, for example, or listening to a podcast—people attending a religious ritual are usually familiar with the ritual and what it means. Perhaps they have read a commentary or attended a Sunday school class that discussed the meaning of the ritual. Participation in the ritual signals a public acceptance of the basic tenets of the religion. The mere fact that the activities that take place within the ritual are well known and accepted lends a sense of stability to the society and imparts a sense of social unity. Also, the fact that the elements of the ritual are repeated on a regular basis lends a sense of validity and sacredness to the religious system.

Prescriptive and situational rituals

There are many terms that we can use to describe rituals. In general, rituals may be prescriptive or situational. **Prescriptive rituals** are rituals that must be performed. The requirement may be set forth in a religious text (e.g., "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" [Exodus 20:8]), may be required by a deity or a religious authority, or may simply be based on tradition.

Other rituals are performed because of a particular need of an individual or community. These are called **situational rituals** or ***crisis rituals***. Such rituals often arise spontaneously, frequently in times of crisis. A community might hold a spontaneous ritual for a group of men and women from the community who are going off to war or engaging in some dangerous activity. Situational rituals arise as a response to warfare around the world. Some are as simple as flying a flag, others more complex, such as the setting up informal altars

Figure 4.1 Women praying at Katta Langur mosque in Uzbekistan; Muslims are prescribed to pray five times a day—at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening.

Source: Wikimedia

where people lay flowers, light candles, and leave photographs. Many churches, temples, and mosques schedule special situational rituals to address the concerns of the community.

Periodic and occasional rituals

Another way of describing rituals is to identify them as being performed on a regular basis as part of a religious calendar or being performed when a particular need arises, such as a marriage or a death. The former is a periodic ritual or ***calendrical ritual***; the latter is called an **occasional ritual**. The classification of rituals as prescribed or situational is separate from their classification as periodic or occasional. Thus, a particular ceremony—a Sunday morning church service, for example—is both prescribed and periodic.

Periodic rituals may be performed daily or several times a day, as in the daily prayers (*salaht*) of Islam (Figure 4.1). Muslims pray at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall, as commanded by the prophet Mohammad, making prayer a *prescribed ritual* as well. Periodic rituals may be performed weekly, such as the Jewish ritual of the lighting of candles that occurs every Friday evening to mark the start of the Sabbath or the celebration of Sunday Mass in the Catholic Church. They also include the annual celebrations of Easter, Passover, Diwali, and Ramadan.

Figure 4.2 Celebrating Diwali, the Festival of Lights, in India; this ritual is recognized by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists.

Source: Wikimedia

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is a periodic ritual and is one of the most important festivals in India. It originated as a Hindu festival, but its observance has spread, and it is celebrated now as a public holiday throughout India. Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists recognize Diwali (Figure 4.2). Diwali is celebrated on the darkest night (the new moon) of the month of Kartik (usually occurring during the months of October and November in the Gregorian calendar). During the festival, oil lamps are lit, and firecrackers are set off. The ritual is associated with several important mythical events. One such story is the return of Rama, his consort Sita, and his brother Lakshmana to their kingdom of Ayodhya after a 14-year exile. The people of Ayodhya are said to have lit up their houses with oil lamps to celebrate their return. The lights that are associated with this festival are said to symbolize the removal of spiritual darkness.

The celebration of Diwali was probably originally related to the harvest season. Many periodic rituals align with phases of the agricultural cycle, including religious rituals in the Jewish and Christian religious calendars. Among agricultural groups, the most important rituals usually coincide with the periods of sowing and harvesting.

For example, Passover is a Jewish commemoration of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. However, many historians believe this holiday was also originally a spring agricultural festival. This can be seen in many of the symbolic foods associated with the Passover Seder or ritual meal, such as parsley, horseradish, and onions. Exactly seven weeks after the Passover holiday is Shavuot. Shavuot is also known as *Yom Habikkurim*, or the Day of the First Fruits, and commemorates both the beginning of the wheat harvest and the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai.

Occasional rituals are rituals that are performed for a specific purpose when a situation arises that requires the ritual to be performed. Many occasional rituals are associated with nature and the impact of nature on the agricultural cycle. These include rituals to control an infestation of insect pests or to bring rain, performed when crops are threatened by drought or flooding. Occasional rituals are also associated with important events in the life of an individual. These include rituals marking birth, marriage, and death.

A classification of rituals

While there is great variation is rituals and any classification is arbitrary to an extent, anthropologist Anthony Wallace proposed a useful classification system. Table 4.1 is based

Table 4.1 A classification of rituals

Type of Ritual	*Description*
Technological rituals	– Rituals that attempt to influence or control nature
• **Rites of intensification**	– Rituals that influence nature in the quest for food
• **Protective rituals**	– Rituals designed to protect the safety of people engaged in dangerous activities
• **Divination rituals**	– Rituals that seek information about the unknown
Therapy rituals	– Rituals that address illness, accident, and death; healing rituals
• **Anti-therapy rituals**	– Rituals that bring about illness, accident, or death
Ideological rituals	– Rituals that serve to maintain the normal functioning of a community
• **Social rites of intensification**	– Rituals that instruct codes of proper behavior and proclaim the community's worldview
• **Rites of passage**	– Rituals that accompany changes in an individual's status in society
Revitalization rituals	– Rituals that focus on the elimination of alien customs and a return to a native way of life

on his categories.[3] Each type of ritual has a specific goal and exists within a cultural and religious context.

Technological rituals

Technological rituals are rituals that attempt to influence or control nature, especially in activities that affect humans and their well-being. The success or failure of human endeavors such as hunting, fishing, and farming is influenced by the vagaries of nature. Game animals might not be located; fish might fail to take the bait; the lack of rain might cause a crop to wither and die. Because these events affect the very survival of a people, all societies attempt to influence or even control nature in order to ensure the success of the hunt, fishing expeditions, or cultivation. Examples of technological rituals include rites of intensification, protective rituals, and divination rituals.

Rites of intensification

The function of **rites of intensification** is to influence nature in the quest for food. These rituals involve all economic activities, such as hunting, gathering, fishing, herding, and farming. They include periodic rituals that follow the seasonal cycle and occasional rituals performed in response to crises, such as lack of rain. They may initiate the hunting of particular animal species as they migrate through a traditional territory at different seasons. At the start of a fishing trip, such rituals are performed to ensure success in locating fish. Rituals accompany the preparation of the soil, the planting of seeds, the protection of the growing crop from the elements and wild animals, and the harvest.

Hopis of the desert Southwest believe that the souls of ancestors travel west to the San Francisco Peaks north of Flagstaff, Arizona, where they live in the Katsina Village. Katsina dances

are performed to induce the *katsinas* to travel east to the Hopi villages in the form of rain clouds to water the cornfields. Other rites of intensification practiced by horticulturalists and agriculturalists include annual planting, first-fruit, or harvest ceremonies, such as the Green Corn Ceremony practiced by Southeastern tribes.

Like other tribes of the Southeast, the annual *Green Corn Ceremony* was the most important ritual performance among the Creeks (Muskogees) before Removal in the 1830s. The ceremony, also referred to as Busk, derived from the Creek word *poskita*, "to fast," an important part of the ritual. Held in August, when the first corn began to ripen, the ceremony lasted four or eight days. The first day of the ceremony began with a gathering in the public plaza to participate in an opening feast—no corn was eaten—in preparation for a period of fasting over the next one to two days; men were required to completely abstain from food, though elders, women, and children could eat particular foods at designated times. During the fasting period, men repaired the town house and all public architecture while women fixed the homes. Eighteenth-century Busk rituals involved cleaning out the homes, destroying old clothes, tools, and household utensils, and disposing of old food, which aligns with the theme of renewal.[4]

Among foragers, the various seasons when particular wild foods are available are often marked by ritual. On a practical level, these rituals regulate the gathering of that food. For example, the premature gathering of a particular type of fruit might negatively affect the total amount of fruit available for the whole community. They also reaffirm the rights of particular social units to specific foods and areas of food gathering. These rituals are frequently referred to as "first-fruit ceremonies." Among the Cahuillas of the southern California desert, individuals would be sent to gather small amounts of food. Food left from the winter stores would be added, and members of each kin group would eat a ritual portion of the food in a ceremony, thanking the supernatural for providing the food in a ceremony that lasted three days and three nights.

Fertility is a central theme in this group of rituals, be it the successful sprouting and growth of crops in the spring or the birth of wild animals, without which people would go hungry. When people are successful in the hunt, rituals are performed to thank the animal for allowing itself to be caught.

Lakotas are a Native American tribe living today in the north-central United States. In the early nineteenth century, they were buffalo hunters. Today, although wild herds of buffalo have disappeared from the plains, Lakotas manage herds of captive buffalo and sell their meat as a major source of income. Occasionally,

St. Francis and ritual

St. Francis of Assisi (ca. 1181–1226) is recognized by Catholics as the patron saint of the animals and the environment. He was well-known for preaching to birds and other animals and even convincing a wolf to stop threatening a nearby village. Many of the stories told about Francis mention his love for animals. On St. Francis' Feast Day on October 4, many Christian groups (Catholics, Episcopalians, and some other Protestant groups) now practice the "blessing of the animals" to acknowledge the importance of animals and Christian responsibilities to care for all of creation. Congregants are encouraged to bring their pets to be blessed by the priest, pastor, or other celebrant for the ritual, and in many places, the ritual is held inside the sanctuary. One by one, the religious leader says a blessing over the beloved pets, which commonly include dogs, cats, gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, rats, lizards, birds, ducks, rabbits, and snakes.

an uncontrollable animal must be killed, which today is accomplished by a shotgun rather than a bow and arrow. But when the animal has died, the hunters gather around the body and perform a simple ritual to thank the buffalo for permitting itself to be killed, thus ensuring a continuing provision of subsistence.

Inuits who live on the Arctic coast depend on seals for their survival. The success of a seal hunt among the Inuits depends on the benevolence of Nuliajuk, the Mother of the Sea. If important customs are neglected, she can cause many difficulties for hunters, such as storms or breaking up the ice. She might also keep the seals out of the reach of the hunters. Inuits believe that Nuliajuk is at her happiest when her hair is neat, but the misbehavior of people can cause her hair to become tangled. In the Inuit creation myth, her fingers were cut off, and the finger joints became the seals, but without fingers, she cannot tend to her hair herself, and it is the role of the shaman to visit her in her home at the bottom of the sea to comb her hair and thereby appease her.

The traditional Inuit belief is that seals have a soul, and many Inuit hunting customs and rituals are designed to show respect for the seals. One example is the practice in many Inuit groups of placing fresh water into the mouth of a dead seal before it is butchered. Some groups believe that a seal given a drink is more likely to return again as another seal for another drink, but the general belief across the groups is that the drink appeases the spirit of the seal.

In the words of an Inuit, Peter Irniq,

> Inuit were extremely respectful toward seals. My father used to catch a seal and put it into our iglu. Before my mother skinned the seal she would put a piece of ice in her own mouth to melt, then let the meltwater fall into the dead seal's mouth. She said this was to make sure the seals under the ice will not be thirsty. She did this every time. It's a spiritual belief, done out of respect for the seals.[5]

Protective rituals

There are numerous potential dangers that accompany risky activities. Imagine traveling in a small dugout canoe out on the ocean, out of sight of land, looking for productive fishing grounds, with no real ability to predict the weather for more than a few hours in advance. **Protective rituals** usually accompany such activities, and they may be prescriptive in that they are routinely performed at the start of a dangerous activity or occasionally in response to a gathering storm.

Kiowa elders say their ancestors could "talk to tornadoes" that passed through their homesteads in southwestern Oklahoma. One elder recalled his grandmother standing outside the storm shelter with outstretched arms singing to the tornado, "We're Kiowas, go away!" while his family hunkered down below. Sometimes, she raised a knife or hatchet towards the funnel cloud so it would split and go around the property.[6]

These rituals are designed to protect the safety of the people involved in dangerous tasks. Protective rituals are also performed in response to some unexpected threat to the success of an economic endeavor. Such threats might include an infestation of insect pests threatening to destroy a crop, floods and droughts, sick animals in a herd, and many other potential crises.

The ocean trading journeys of the Trobriand Islanders of New Guinea are dangerous. There are numerous concerns, including ensuring the seaworthiness of canoes and the desire for

good weather. These voyages are accompanied by a great number of rituals. The canoe captain is not only an expert on navigation and weather prediction but also a ritual specialist, performing rituals throughout the voyage; some rituals performed before the launching of a canoe include rituals for expelling the heaviness out of a canoe, rituals to make the canoe more seaworthy, and rituals to make the canoe go fast, in part by making other canoes slow.

Rituals for the protection of boats on the open ocean are common among seagoing peoples. Vikings christened a new ship by "blooding the keel," which involved a ritual human sacrifice in which a person was tied to the keel of the boat to be crushed beneath it when the boat was launched. The Western practice of christening a new ship by breaking a bottle of champagne still carries the idea of a sacred blessing, and the person who does the christening enters into a special relationship with the ship (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3 Christening a ship.
Source: Wikimedia

Protective rituals are also used for other modes of transportation. Among the Yorubas of Nigeria in West Africa (Guinea Coast culture area), Ogun is the god of iron. More recently, Ogun has also become associated with cars and trucks. It is common for taxi drivers to decorate their cars with his symbols and even, on occasion, to offer an animal sacrifice to him, asking for his protection.

Divination rituals

Often, it is not actual control that is needed. Foreknowledge of natural events that affect the success of economic efforts can lead to preventive measures, be they technical (building a fence to keep wild animals out of the field) or ritual. Such ceremonies assist communities in selecting the best time to plant or the best place to locate game or fish. Rituals that seek information are referred to as **divination rituals**.

Divination rituals also attempt to predict the future or to find lost objects/people. For example, Cheyenne warriors sometimes cut open a badger to examine the congealed pool of blood. If a man saw his reflection, he knew he would be killed in the next military engagement with enemies. Lakotas living in Pine Ridge Reservation still practice the *Yuwipi* ceremony to find missing people or objects or to diagnose illness. Antecedents of divination in the modern world include reading tea leaves, astrological signs and horoscopes, tarot cards, or randomly selecting Bible verses. (Divination will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.)

Therapy rituals and healing

Of all the tragedies that may befall a people, perhaps the most disturbing and disruptive are illnesses and accidents that lead to incapacity or death. All peoples have theories about

the causes of illness and accidents, and these are associated with techniques, including rituals, for addressing them. (Explanatory models will be discussed in Chapter 11.)

There are a number of methods for dealing with accidents and illnesses that are technical rather than religious. For example, many traditional healers know how to set bones and many of the plant materials that are administered as medicines have been found to have genuine medical value. The anthropological study of medicinal plants is part of the study of *ethnobotany*. Such studies have led to the development of several drug therapies. Some plant materials have been known for centuries to have pharmaceutical properties, such as digitalis from the foxglove plant, which is used to treat heart problems. More recently, the drug Taxol, derived from the bark and needles of the Pacific yew tree, has been used for the treatment of ovarian cancer. Northwest Coast Native American tribes traditionally treated a variety of diseases with medicines derived from this tree.

Many illnesses cannot be dealt with through technology, especially in traditional societies. Various theories of illness give rise to many types of cures that include ritual. Rituals that focus on curing are called **therapy rituals**. These are among the most important rituals found in many societies. The type of ritual will depend on the cause of the illness, with the cause frequently being discovered by means of divination. (See Chapters 7 and 11.)

Navajo healing rites

Navajo worldview stresses the importance of *hozho*, balance, goodness, happiness, health, and harmony. When this balance is upset, something bad, usually illness, is the result. Balance is upset by human actions, and the specific nature of the transgression will determine how the illness will manifest itself. Navajos have separate specialists for diagnosis and treatment. Diagnosis is done by *hand tremblers*, who are generally women, while healers are usually men.

Figure 4.4 Navajo men creating a sandpainting in Monument Valley, Utah. The act of creating the sandpainting is an important therapy ritual.

Source: Alamy

The entire family or even the entire community will gather together for the therapy ritual. It lasts anywhere from one to nine days. Prayers, medicine, songs, and herbs, in addition to sandpaintings, are used to restore balance and harmony and thus cure the illness. The Navajo word for sandpainting is *ikaah*, which means "a summoning of the gods." They believe that if a prayer is offered with a good heart and is correct in every detail, the gods are compelled to answer it. If they do not answer, there must have been some imperfection in the sandpainting or the ceremony (Figure 4.4).

The sandpainting itself depicts a specific portion of the complex Navajo mythology. Usually, this is a story of a hero who encounters some misfortune, but with help from others, usually a supernatural being, the hero recovers and learns how to heal the same problem in others. The story also is recounted in long, complex chants. In sandpainting, there is a relationship between ritual, myth, and worldview.

Anti-therapy rituals

Anti-therapy rituals are rituals that bring about illness, accident, or death. When directed toward a member of one's own community, the behavior is clearly antisocial. The person responsible needs to be identified, usually through divination, stopped, and punished. However, when directed toward an enemy, an anti-therapy ritual may support an objective of the society. Among the Yanomamös of northern South America, warfare is carried out with spears and arrows, as well as through ritual activities that send illness-causing spirits (called *tsentsak*) into the bodies of their enemies.

An anti-therapy ritual of the Fores of New Guinea was described in Chapter 1. A sorcerer takes something connected to the victim, such as a piece of clothing, and places it in a bundle, recites a spell, and puts the bundle in the cold, muddy ground. As a result, the victim becomes ill with the disease *kuru*.

Perhaps one of the best-known examples of an anti-therapy ritual is the bone-pointing ritual found among Australian Aborigines. This is sometimes referred to as a **cursing ritual**. Taking a kangaroo bone, the individual performing the ritual sharpens one end and drills a hole through the other. He takes a strand of the victim's hair, puts it through the hole, and secures it with a knot. Then, in public, the performer points the bone at the victim. Here is a description of what happens next:

> A man who discovers that he is being boned by an enemy is, indeed, a pitiable sight. He stands aghast, with his eyes staring at the treacherous pointer, and with his hands lifted as though to ward off the lethal medium, which he imagines is pouring into his body. His cheeks blanch and his eyes become glassy, and the expression on his face becomes horribly distorted. . . . He attempts to shriek, but usually the sound chokes in his throat, and all one might see is froth at his mouth. His body begins to tremble and the muscles twist involuntarily. He sways backwards and falls to the ground, and for a short time appears to be in a swoon; but soon after he begins to writhe as if in mortal agony, and covering his face with his hands, begins to moan. After a while he becomes more composed and crawls to his *wurley* [hut]. From this time onwards he sickens and frets, refusing to eat, and keeping aloof from the daily affairs of the tribe. Unless help is forthcoming in the shape of a counter-charm, administered by the hands of the "Nangarri," or medicine-man, his death is only a matter of a comparatively short time.[7]

Ideological rituals

Another group of rituals is **ideological rituals**, which serve to maintain the normal functioning of a community. They delineate codes of proper behavior, define good and evil,

moral and immoral, and articulate the community's worldview. They assist people and the community in getting through times of change and times of crisis and facilitate the orderly running of the society. They tend to be conservative, sanctioning the social order. The rituals stress the importance of the group over the individual.

An important type of ideological ritual is the **social rite of intensification**. These are very familiar rituals. They are usually prescribed and periodic and include the weekly Sunday morning church service found in most Christian denominations, the Jewish Sabbath rituals, and the daily prayer or *salaht* of Islam. They also include major annual rituals such as the Christian Easter and the Jewish Rosh Hashanah. Elements that are frequently found in social rites of intensification that are most familiar to us include the reading of sections of the sacred text, a sermon, commenting on some aspects of the sacred text, commentary on current crises, or a discussion of moral issues, and prayers to the deity.

Some rituals have aspects that can be classified into more than one category. A good example is a *funeral ritual*, which is often both a rite of passage for the individual who has died (discussed in the next subsection) and a rite of intensification for those who remain. A death is a time of crisis for the group. The funeral ritual brings people together and reaffirms the existence of the social group and its values. This is seen most clearly when we examine the rituals surrounding the death of a chief or king. The death affects the entire community and ushers in a period of potential instability. In the absence of a strong leader, the group may be vulnerable to internal strife. Enemies may take advantage of the lack of strong leadership and the fact that the focus of the community is on the death.

Among the Swazis of the East African Cattle culture area, the death of a king has the potential to precipitate a major crisis. The prosperity of the Swazi nation is bound up with the health and virility of the king, and during his life, the king must avoid all contact with death. He may not visit a grave or touch a dead body and may mourn the passing of a close relative for only a few days. Individuals living in his household are removed from the homestead when they become very ill so they will not die in the king's presence. The death of the king is kept secret until a council of kin has made the selection of an heir. Only after the heir has been installed as the new king will the burial of the old king proceed. Following the period of mourning, rituals are held to rejuvenate and revitalize the Swazi nation.

Another example of the element of a social rite of intensification in a funeral ritual is the Jewish practice of reciting the *kaddish*. The kaddish is known as a mourner's prayer, but variations on this prayer are recited at many other times, and the prayer itself actually says nothing about death or mourning. This prayer is a reaffirmation of faith in the face of a great loss. The prayer begins,

> May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetime and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire family of Israel, swiftly and soon. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.[8]

Similarly, the simple practice of gathering at the home of the mourner after a funeral service can be seen as reaffirming important group ties.

Offerings and sacrifices

One of the functions of social rites of intensification, and other rituals as well, is to communicate with the deity. One way of doing this is through prayer; another is through **offerings** and **sacrifices**. Offerings and sacrifices can be viewed in many ways. They may be gifts, bribes, or economic exchanges designed to influence the supernatural. The supernatural, in turn, will reciprocate with rain, healing, economic success, and so on. Of course, this is in no way coercion, and the deity is free to reject the gift.

Figure 4.5 Ex-voto offerings at Nosso Senhor do Bonfim, a Catholic church in Salvador, Bahia, Brasil. Ex-votos are tangible offerings of gratitude for healing, often associated with the body.

Source: Alamy

In many societies, reciprocity plays an important role in social relationships. Important social events, such as marriages, are celebrated with gift-giving and feasting. In these societies, this type of behavior is projected into the supernatural world, where a harmonious and mutually advantageous relationship between the society and the supernatural will be expressed in terms of mutual reciprocity between humans and their gods.

The essential difference between sacrifices and offerings is that in sacrifice, blood is shed; that is, an animal, or sometimes a human being, is killed. All other gifts are (bloodless) offerings (Figure 4.5). The item offered is usually an object of some economic value, and its offering often involves economic hardship for the individual or group making the offering. It, therefore, becomes special or even sacred. However, some of the economic value may be recovered when, for example, food offered on an altar is later consumed by those making the offering. Of course, this does not happen when the offering is destroyed, as when it is burned.

Human sacrifice

Aztec society (Mesoamerican culture area) was based on agriculture and was highly stratified. The Aztecs believed that the life of the Sun was about to end and tried to avoid it by providing the sacred food that the Sun needed: blood. Human sacrifice on a large scale was an important part of Aztec religion.

A ritual would begin with a four-day (or some multiple of four) period of preparation. During this time, priests would fast and make offerings of such items as food, cloth, and incense. The ritual itself would be preceded by a dramatic procession. The participants, elaborately costumed and accompanied by music ensembles, would walk to the specific temple of sacrifice. All-important rituals involved the sacrifice of either animals or humans.

The ritual human sacrificial victims were called *in ixiptla in teteo*, or deity impersonators, as the belief was that they were transformed into gods. They would be ritually bathed, specially costumed to impersonate the specific deity to whom they were being sacrificed, and taught special dances. A wide range of techniques were used in sacrifice, including decapitation, drowning, strangulation, shooting with arrows, combat, and throwing from heights. Commonly, the victim was led up the temple stairs to the sacrificial stone (*techcatl*). There, the victim would be held down by four priests, and the temple priest would cut through the victim's chest to remove the still-beating heart, referred to as "precious eagle cactus fruit." The heart would then be offered to the Sun for nourishment. This was sometimes followed by the body being rolled back down the temple steps, where it was often dismembered, flayed, and eaten.

Do myths rightfully justify cultural practices like human sacrifice? Myth ties into belief and ritual because every culture has rituals in which the creation is alluded to or recreated. Performances of rituals symbolically linked to creation bring about spiritual and physical renewal of the people. From an outsider's view, however, the rituals influenced by myths might be unacceptable. For instance, Aztecs performed human sacrifice on a daily basis because they believed the Sun would not rise each morning without the nourishment of human hearts. Neighboring peoples like the Tlaxcalans were forced to provide sacrificial victims through tribute, which did not make the Aztecs popular. Like the Aztecs, the Pawnees of central Nebraska were unpopular because of their practice of human sacrifice (Box 4.1).

Box 4.1 Morning star ceremony

In the Central Plains of present-day Nebraska, the Caddoan-speaking Skiri Pawnees practiced the Morning Star Ceremony through the mid-nineteenth century. This rite of death and rebirth was based on the creation story in which *Tirawahat* created the universe consisting of the stars and the planets, including Morning Star (Mars) and Evening Star (Venus):

Table 4.2 Skiri cosmology

Morning Star (East)	*Evening Star (West)*
Sun and Light	Moon and Darkness
Male and Fire	Female and Fertility

According to Skiri cosmology, *Tirawahat* made four monsters that protected Evening Star's womb. Aided by Sun, Morning Star traveled east to west, killed the four beasts, and seduced Evening Star. After this mating, the first Pawnee, a girl, was born. Sun and Moon were the parents of the first boy.

Afterward, the Morning Star returned to the east but was not as bright as before because he had sacrificed much of his strength while mating. Hence, he demanded a sacrifice from the Pawnees whenever he wanted it. (Embedded in the symbolism is

Pawnee kinship practice—at the time, the Pawnees were a matrilineal society with matrilocal residence: hence, at marriage, the female stays with her family, and the male [Morning Star] comes to live with her.)

The ceremony only occurred if Morning Star came to an important man during a vision. Typically, the visitation occurred in the spring when everything was in leaf. In the vision, Morning Star demanded the sacrifice of a virgin girl. The dream recipient went to the earthlodge of the Wolf Priest, keeper of the Morning Star Bundle, where he sought comfort and advice. Later in the summer, a war party departed to capture a virgin from another tribe. The captive girl was brought to the Wolf Priest's lodge and, through the next winter, lived with him as a daughter.

About a year after Morning Star visited the important man in a dream, the ceremony was conducted, typically far away from the villages. All eligible men and boys were expected to attend the ritual, whereas women and girls were required to remain indoors. Led out of the Wolf Priest's lodge, the girl was naked and had the left side of her body painted black (night, the time of Evening Star) and the right side painted red (day, the time of Morning Star). She was tied to a scaffold facing east under which a pit lined with white eagle down had been excavated. The pit represented where Morning Star lived.

The sacrifice was made when one of the priests shot an arrow through her heart, then another took a knife and made an incision over her heart. Her blood dripped on consecrated buffalo meat, including the heart and tongue. It was considered bad luck if any blood dripped on the eagle down. All eligible men, including boys, then shot an arrow into her back. Afterward, her body was taken to the prairie and placed face down, facing east. They sang:

The whole earth shall turn into.
The whole earth shall receive her blood.

Everyone returned to the ceremonial earthlodge, where the consecrated buffalo meat was eaten in a feast.

Symbolically, Morning Star received the sacrifice representing the first girl born to the Pawnees. He would now look after his people in peace and in war. Thus, the creation story was recreated, in which "fruitfulness and light had come into the world because Morning Star and his realm of light had conquered and mated with Evening Star in her realm of darkness." Skiri Pawnees believed that the successful completion of the sacrifice would "ensure the fertility of their soil and the success of their crops."[9]

The Skiri Pawnee creation myth that inspired the Morning Star Ceremony did not endear them to their enemies, especially the Lakotas, Cheyennes, Comanches, and others. The torch of warfare burned on the Plains for years, as the Pawnees were enemies with practically every Plains tribe.

Maya sacrifice and autosacrifice

Contemporary Mayas still acknowledge three levels of the universe—Upperworld, Middleworld, and Underworld. Geographically, the Maya area—Yucatán Peninsula, adjacent Guatemala, and Belize—is a porous limestone shelf replete with vast underground caverns. Few rivers exist aboveground, but some of the longest underground rivers in the world flow through the caverns. Underground water is accessible by descending through *cenotes*, sinkholes created when limestone bedrock collapses. Mayas believe cenotes and caves are portals to the Underworld, known as *Xibalba*, the land of the dead or the place of fear. Inhabited by the Lords of Xibalba, the Underworld is a place of creation and death. Most importantly, caves are the homes of the gods responsible for life and death, rain, and agricultural fertility.

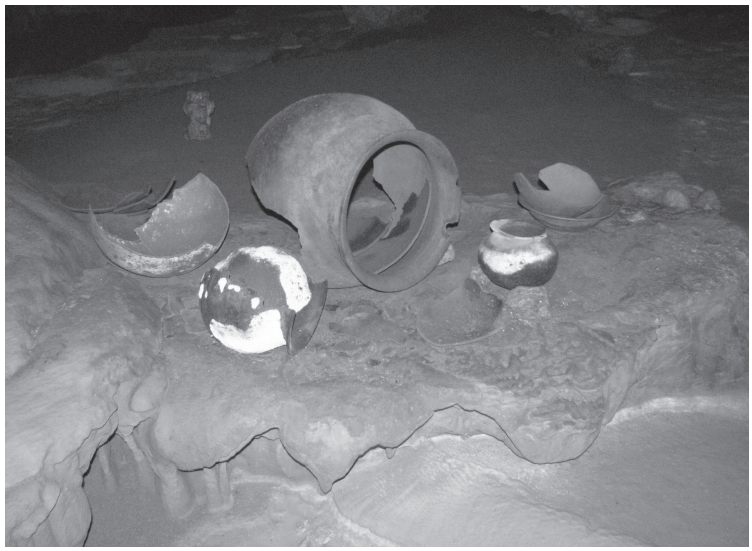

Figure 4.6 (a) Pottery offerings, Actun Tunichil Muknal, "Cave of the Stone Sepulcher," Belize, Central America.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

Figure 4.6 (b) Actun Tunichil Muknal, "Cave of the Stone Sepulcher," Belize, Central America. This 16-year-old (approx.) girl was sacrificed under a drip zone about a mile deep into the cave.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

For centuries, Mayas have left offerings of corn, chili peppers, pine needles, and cacao beans in pottery vessels in the dark zones of caves for the rain god, Chaac (Figure 4.6a). Hunting, farming, and corn processing tools are offered as well. Afterbirth is buried in caves, and through the early colonial period, humans—especially children—were sacrificed and placed in drip zones and areas of seasonal water flow during times of drought (Figure 4.6b). Mayas believe that the steam, or breath, emanating from caves is *ch'ulel*, "soul stuff," which is also released from the human body through bloodletting, the ultimate sacrifice. In ancestral times, men performed "scattering," or bloodletting ceremonies in the dark zones of caves—and inner recesses of temples—by piercing their tongues or penises with obsidian perforators,

then drawing corded stingray spines through the apertures. This sacrifice fed the gods one's *ch'ulel*, and allowed the supplicant to conjure *way*, "companion spirits" that live in the mist and clouds at the mouths of caves. Today, tour guides take visitors through the famous *Actun Tunichil Muknal*, Cave of the Stone Sepulcher, in Belize, Central America.

Rites of passage

Among the most-studied rituals by anthropologists are **rites of passage**, a type of ideological ritual. A society consists of a number of individuals who are related to one another and interact with one another in complex ways. We can think of a society as composed of a series of positions, each one defined in terms of appropriate behavior, rights, obligations, and relationships to one another. Each position is known as a **status**. Examples of statuses include mother, husband, teacher, blacksmith, mayor, and priest. Of course, a person can occupy more than one status. One person can be a mother, a wife, and a teacher, depending on the social context.

When a person changes their status in the society—becomes an adult, marries, enters a profession, or attains political office—the individual alters their social relationship with other members of the society. Such changes might require that the individual dress in a new way, speak in a different fashion, and behave toward certain people in new ways. Making these changes requires adaptation by the individual and also by the collective society itself. These changes are marked and facilitated by rites of passage.

Rites of passage imprint the change in a person's social status on the minds of the participants and grant community approval or legitimacy for the change. In a literate society such as ours, all one truly needs is a legal piece of paper. A couple can fly to Las Vegas or go to the local courthouse and be married with a brief ceremony without the presence of family or other community members. It is the marriage license, not the ceremony, which establishes the legality of the change in status and inserts the event in the legal record of a political unit. This is not the case in small-scale societies, where the combined witnesses and participation of family and community are required. Interestingly, most couples in complex societies choose to get married in this manner as well.

Some rites of passage are very familiar. These include rites marking a person's progression through the life cycle. All cultures have terminology to refer to the phases of one's life—infant, child, adult, and elder, for example. However, these divisions of the life cycle are more formal and clear-cut in some societies than in others. As a person moves from one category to the next, the event is often marked by ritual.

The life cycle begins with birth ceremonies designed to ensure the safety and well-being of the child. Through these rituals the child becomes an integral part of the community. However, in societies with a high infant death rate, the introduction of the child to the community may be delayed. A child may be kept in isolation and is considered a nonperson until they survive for a certain period of time. In traditional societies, the child might then be presented to the family and other members of the community, receive a name, perhaps be passed over the smoke of a fire, and have strings tied around the wrists to prevent the child from falling ill. Examples of birth rituals in our society are baptism in Catholicism, by which the child becomes a member of a Catholic community, and the Jewish **circumcision** ceremony, whereby a male child becomes a member of the Jewish community.

Figure 4.7 A group of quinceañera girls in Azcapotzalco, Mexico. For the procession in this rite of passage, the young girl is accompanied by her father.

Source: Wikimedia

The next major transition is that from childhood into adulthood. These coming-of-age ceremonies include confirmations, *quinceañeras*, bar mitzvahs, and bat mitzvahs (Figure 4.7). Other important life cycle ceremonies are marriage and death rituals. In addition to life cycle ceremonies, rites of passage mark initiation into social groups (such as fraternity initiations) or religious or political office (such as a presidential inauguration or coronation). Some cultures celebrate additional rites of passage such as first haircutting, various later coming-of-age birthdays (18, 21, 40), first hunt, and graduations, among others.

The structure of a rite of passage

A rite of passage that you are probably familiar with is a wedding, which actually consists of a series of rituals performed over a period of time. Although there is considerable variation, a general pattern is found in many weddings. We will use this example to describe the structure of a rite of passage.

French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep identified three phases in the typical rite of passage. The first phase is called **separation**. In this phase, the individual is removed from his or her former status. In some rituals, this is an abrupt separation of the individual from the community; in others, it may take place over a longer period of time.

The separation phase in a wedding is actually a series of events that take place over the period of time preceding the ceremony. A typical wedding cycle might begin with an engagement party. Next follows a number of planning and preparation activities, frequently involving wedding specialists. Although these are usually thought of as practical, logistical activities, they often take on the characteristics of ritual in that they consist of traditional activities. These include the selection of a wedding dress, costuming the wedding party, selecting and mailing invitations, signing up with a gift registry, choosing the cake, attending wedding showers, the rehearsal, and the rehearsal dinner. The final event in the separation phase is when the bride walks down the aisle and bids farewell to her parents and, in some ceremonies, is formally "given away" by her father and/or mother or other close relative.

The second step is the **transition** phase. During the transition phase, several activities take place that bring about the change in status. In many weddings, this phase, which is the actual ceremony, lasts from only a few minutes to over an hour. This is relatively short compared to rites of passage found in other societies, in which the transition phase can last months or even years.

At the conclusion of the transition phase, the person conducting the wedding ceremony will often introduce the newly married couple to the congregation as "Mr. and Mrs." Thus begins the final phase, **reincorporation**, during which the couple re-enters normal society, though in a new social relationship. This stage includes the reception or party celebrating the marriage. The reincorporation phase usually lasts several hours, although in many groups, it is considerably longer. After the reception, there is often a series of additional activities, such as a display of gifts and the writing of thank-you notes.

All of this can be quite daunting and very expensive. Of course, a couple can fly to Las Vegas or go to the local courthouse, get the piece of paper, and skip most of the traditional activities. However, many couples and their families are eager to celebrate wedding rituals with family and friends, and, for many, the religious wedding ritual is sacred and is the most socially binding ceremony, not the legal contract.

Coming-of-age rituals

A ritual that frequently assumes great importance in traditional societies is the **coming-of-age ritual**, which marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. An example is the rite of passage that accompanies *menarche*, or a girl's first menstruation. Menarche is only one physiological event within a complex cycle of events we call *puberty* that extends over several years. However, menarche is a very definite, easily observed event.

Because puberty is so well marked in females, the ritual is sometimes an individual ritual rather than for a group of girls at the same time. The announcement of first menstruation by a girl to her mother may initiate the separation phase. Among the Yanomamös of South America, a girl menstruating for the first time is secluded in a simple enclosure built in the corner of her dwelling. The transition period lasts three days, during which the girl sits on the floor eating little. She shaves her head and removes her ornaments in an effort to look as unattractive as possible. This is done to prevent evil spirits from seducing the girl and taking her away to be married, leaving behind her dead body. At the end of this period, she is incorporated into the community. She cleans herself and puts on a new apron and ornaments. She is now considered to be an adult female member of the community.

Female coming-of-age rituals may also occur as a group ritual. In this case, the ritual usually occurs several years before the onset of puberty to ensure that the ritual is completed before the onset of menstruation.

Initiation rituals for boys are often more elaborate than those for girls. Because boys lack a clearly defined physiological event to mark the onset of puberty, the timing of male initiation is fairly arbitrary. Male initiation rituals are usually group rituals in which all of the boys of a certain age range in a community are periodically rounded up to go through the ritual as a group (see further on).

Male initiation ceremonies are usually characterized by relatively short separation and reincorporation phases. The separation phase may be very sudden, as when masked dancers tear the boys away from their families without warning. The reincorporation phase may simply be a reintroduction of the boys, now occupying their new status as men, to the community, followed by feasting.

Transition and liminality

Initiates in the transition stage, especially in those rituals in which this stage lasts for an extended period of time, are in an out-of-the-ordinary situation. They have shed their previous identification and place in society but have yet to take on the mantle of their new status. Their ambiguous position and the fact that they are marginal to their society—often in a real sense if they are removed to a special camp away from the village—are represented symbolically.

An often-encountered metaphor for a rite of passage is the cycle of death and rebirth. Separation is symbolized by death, and reincorporation by rebirth. The period of time between death and rebirth is a time of mystery during which the initiate undergoes a metamorphosis from one kind of human being to another. Just as the process of change within an insect's cocoon is hidden from view and, therefore, mysterious, the activities surrounding the transitional phase may be hidden from view from women and uninitiated boys.

Initiates within this transition period are said to be in a liminal state. **Liminality** is the state of ambiguous marginality during which the metamorphosis takes place, when an individual is betwixt and between social status, in transition. Anthropologist Victor Turner defined a series of characteristics associated with the liminal state. The first column in Table 4.3 lists some of the properties of liminality, contrasted in the second column with the normal state.

An important feature of the state of liminality is summed up by the term **communitas**. Within this state, not only is there a sense of equality, but the mere fact that a group of individuals is moving through the process together brings about an intense sense of social bonding and common identity. This is what occurs in the Islamic *hajj*, in which all pilgrims wear the same white garments and perform the same rituals regardless of wealth or social standing. The sense of belonging transcends the tremendous ethnic diversity of the pilgrims who gather together from all over the world.

Table 4.3 Characteristics of liminality

Liminality	*Normal (non-liminal) state*
Transition	Steady state
Communitas	Structure
Equality	Inequality
Anonymity	Systems of nomenclature
Absence of property	Property
Absence of status	Status
Nakedness or uniform clothing	Distinctions of clothing
Sexual continence (asexuality)	Sexuality
Absence of rank	Distinctions of rank
Humility	Pride of position
Disregard for personal appearance	Care for personal appearance
Unselfishness	Selfishness
Total obedience	Obedience only to superior rank
Sacredness	Secularity
Silence	Speech
Simplicity	Complexity
Acceptance of pain and suffering	Avoidance of pain and suffering

Source: Adapted from Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), pp. 94–113, 125–130.

Victor Turner identified three types of communitas,[10] all of which may be associated with religious groups and experiences:

- **existential communitas** is social bonding provoked by a random or unplanned event, usually on a large scale (such as a national tragedy, the death of a charismatic leader, and, less frequently, by a joyous life event such as a wedding or the birth of a child—e.g., a royal wedding).
- **ideological communitas** is social bonding that occurs when a group separates off from another larger group ("cloisters") and identifies as set apart from society-at-large; this form of communitas allows the group to develop a unique identity.
- **normative communitas** is social bonding that develops from the regular, periodic routine followed by a group—its norms and rituals—and the way it defines membership. In a religious group, this usually involves periodic and calendrical rituals (from annual religious holy days to daily prayers). Normative communitas stabilizes groups and institutions and makes them viable.

In many traditional societies, the boys who are initiated together form very close bonds and will usually remain close friends throughout their lives. In some African societies, this group of males will become a formal group known as an **age set**. Age sets cut across other group boundaries, such as clans and lineages, and create solidarity between groups that often are opposed to one another or in competition. Age sets serve a number of functions and may serve as important social units, such as military units.

Members of an age set may move together through various age grades. An **age grade** is a specific status defined by age, such as warrior or elder, as found in Kenya in Maasai men's groups (Figure 4.8). We can think of a system of age grades as a classification of an individual into age categories. An individual or a group, such as an age set, will move through a series of age grades during their lives. Here, the distinction is more complex than just a transition from child to adult, and rites of passage often mark the entrance into each age grade.

Figure 4.8 A Maasai boy during his puberty ritual, wearing face paint and a cloak.

Source: Wikimedia

Apache rite of passage

The coming-of-age ceremony for Apache girls (Southwest culture area) is a periodic ritual held every July. Called the Sunrise Ceremony, the ritual lasts four days, mirroring the four days of creation. For the duration of the ceremony, the girls are seen as reincarnations of the cultural

heroine, White Painted Woman. Apaches say that White Painted Woman first appeared as a young girl, arriving from the east. She grew to adulthood, during which time she was associated with the south. As she grew older, she was associated with the west, the direction taken by those who died. Then, as a very old woman, she was associated with the north. However, after she died, she appeared again the next day as a young woman in the east. Thus, White Painted Woman symbolizes the cycle of women's lives. The girls wear special regalia that contain many items symbolic of White Painted Woman.

Every evening there is singing and dancing. On the first night, the songs refer to the first day of creation and so on until the last evening. The ritual that is performed on the fourth night is called *pulling the sun*. This ritual must be carefully planned and timed. The ritual specialists, known as *singers*, sing four sun-pulling songs, moving their hands, which have been painted with sun symbols, into different positions. As the last verse of the song is sung, the singers raise their hands over their heads. It is timed so that on the last note, the sun rises over the mountains and falls on the singers' raised hands.

After this ritual is completed, the girls run back to the places where they are staying during the ritual, but they are not seen doing this because four large poles that were erected at the start of the ceremony now come crashing down, causing the other people to turn and look at the source of the noise. The next time the girls are seen, they are adult women. As the final component, the girl's singer comes to the girl to recite her genealogy to her. Apaches are a matrilineal society, tracing kinship through the mother's kin. The singer places three small bits of food in the girl's mouth, and her godmother places a fourth bit of food. This symbolizes the girl being fed by all the women of her tribe of all time.

Secular rites of passage

We find a number of secular rites of passage and other nonreligious activities that have many of the characteristics of rites of passage. One of these is basic military training, which has many characteristics of coming-of-age rites in tribal societies. The recruits are physically removed to an isolated and special place, the military base, where they shed their civilian clothing, cut their hair, and are issued a standardized uniform. Civilian occupational specializations and socioeconomic ranks become irrelevant. The actual training has many of the features of transition, including the development of communitas, equality, total obedience, acceptance of pain, and many other features of liminality listed in Table 4.3. Graduation from basic training would be the beginning of reincorporation. However, there is one major difference between military training and tribal coming-of-age rituals. After completing military service, the individuals often return to the status they occupied before induction and undergo a period of readjustment during which they discard their military identity.

Another example is the experience of a patient entering a hospital. Separation begins when the patient enters the hospital, has his clothes taken away from him, and is given a standardized "uniform." The actual medical procedures represent transitions as the individual is in some way changed. Some of the experiences of the patient resemble features of a liminal state. Discharge represents incorporation. However, unlike the typical rite of passage, the process seldom results in a permanent change of status that is acknowledged by society, except perhaps in the case of permanent disability.

Revitalization rituals

A final category of rituals is **revitalization rituals**, which are associated with revitalization movements. These include *nativistic movements*, which focus on the elimination of alien customs and a return to the native way of life, and *messianic movements*, which involve the participation of a divine savior in human flesh. Older theories explain how these rituals are associated with social movements and usually develop within a context of rapid cultural change, though new theories focus on parity and ascendancy instead of crisis and stress. We will discuss revitalization rituals in detail in Chapter 12.

Alterations of the human body

All peoples have cultural images of themselves that serve to separate them from the rest of the animal world. Physical appearance serves to distinguish individuals socially with regard to such attributes as gender, age, social status, occupation, and membership in age and social groups. Many rituals involve temporary alterations of the human body, such as when paint is applied to the body to symbolize that an individual is in a liminal state. Changes in status through rites of passage are often marked with changes in dress and hairstyle that mark the individual's new status.

Other alterations may be more permanent changes to the human body. The process of producing the alteration creates a situation in which the individual must endure a painful procedure. Being able to have one's body cut, pierced, tattooed, and scarred without showing pain is often a critical element in rites of passage. The experience and acceptance of pain is an important feature of liminality, and this pain may play a role in developing an altered state of consciousness (see Chapter 5), an important aspect of a ritual experience.

Genital cutting

Circumcision, the removal of the foreskin of the penis, is found in many cultures. In Judaism, the male circumcision ceremony is referred to as a *Berit Mila* (often called a *bris*). *Berit* means covenant, and *Mila* means "to cut," so a *Berit Mila* cuts, as in marks, the covenant with God. The ritual is a prescriptive one and is based on a passage from Genesis:

> And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.
>
> (Genesis 17:9–12)

The circumcision is performed by a ritual specialist known as a *mohel*. The ritual also includes a formal naming of the child. For girls, the ceremony is called a *Brit Bat* (or Covenant of Daughters) and includes the naming portion only.

Circumcision is also traditional in Islam. However, here, circumcision often takes place later, frequently around the age of seven, although the age may vary from soon after birth to the time of puberty. In the latter case, the circumcision ritual becomes a true puberty ritual.

There are other modifications of the penis found in many traditional cultures. Perhaps the best known is **subincision**. In subincision, the underside of the penis is cut and the urethra slit open. The length of the slit varies. In some cases, the cut is deep enough to fork the tip of the penis. Some Australian Aborigines considered this symbolic of a serpent deity; in other Aboriginal groups, the subincision was reopened periodically for ritual bleeding.

Surgeries that are analogous, to a degree, to male circumcision are also found in females in many cultures. There are several forms of what is sometimes known as *female circumcision* or genital cutting. The simplest forms are where the prepuce (analogous to the male foreskin) of the clitoris or a part of the clitoris itself is removed. Sometimes, the labia minora is removed with the clitoris. These forms are referred to as **clitoridectomy**. The more extreme forms are termed **infibulation**. In *Pharaonic infibulation*, found in many areas of northeastern Africa, the entire clitoris, labia minora, and labia majora are removed, and the remnants of the latter are sewn together, leaving a small opening for urination and the passing of menstrual blood. This surgery prevents sexual intercourse and is often a requirement for marriage. The wound is reopened by or for sexual intercourse.

Female cutting may be done at adolescence as a part of a rite of passage, but it is often performed much earlier. The procedure symbolizes protecting the family's honor and controlling female sexuality. Although many individuals who participate in female genital cutting believe that such an action is prescribed by the Qur'an, it is not mentioned in the Qur'an. Actually, the practice predates both Islam and Christianity and is also practiced in some Christian communities.

Many international organizations, including the United Nations, are working to eliminate the practice of genital cutting. On the one hand, this is seen as a *public health issue*, especially because the surgery is frequently performed under unsanitary conditions by individuals not trained in proper medical and surgical techniques. The practice is also associated with infections, infertility, and even death. On the other hand, it can be seen as a *human rights issue*, cast as violence against women and children.

Although respectful of religious beliefs and differences between cultures, because of the previously mentioned concerns, many

Genital cutting in the U.S.

Because of its cultural significance in some immigrant communities and across religious faiths, female circumcision has become a legal issue in the United States, especially for doctors performing the procedure. As of August 2023, 41 U.S. states have passed a spectrum of laws to protect women from female "cutting" or female genital mutilation (FGM), and there is also federal legislation since 1996 making it a criminal offense to "cut" a minor girl: "The U.S. Government understands that FGM/C may be carried out in accordance with traditional beliefs and as part of adulthood initiation rites. Nevertheless, the U.S. Government considers FGM/C to be a serious human rights abuse, and a form of gender-based violence and child abuse."[11]

anthropologists believe cultural relativism should be suspended because of the dangers associated with female genital cutting. Genital cutting, though, is an essential element in many religious practices, including Islam and Judaism, which practice male circumcision. And there are many who see male circumcision as genital mutilation as well. What is to one community an expression of religion and culture may be to another community a violation of basic human rights. The big questions are these: Where is the line to be drawn between these practices, and who gets to draw it?

Pilgrimage as a religious ritual

In Chapter 3 we looked at stories that tell of the creation of the earth and of humankind. In particular, we read the story of creation in Genesis and the story of creation as told by Navajos. One difference between the Judeo-Christian and Navajo stories is that the former takes place at a location that cannot be located on a modern map or visited by tourists. The Garden of Eden may be a supernatural place or a place whose location has been lost. In either case, it is far removed from the immediate landscape of people who read the narrative and is, rather, a part of the religious *imaginary*.

By contrast, Navajos live in the midst of the landscape of the creation, similar to Australian Aboriginals. As they move through their world, they point to mountains, streams, and rock formations mentioned in their myths. The landscape is a constant reminder of their mythological past, and they interact with this past on a daily basis.

All religions are associated with sacred places mentioned in their religious stories, places associated with important events in the past. Muslims have the Kaaba in Mecca; Jews have the Temple Mount (Western Wall) in Jerusalem; Christians have places in Jerusalem that are recounted in the story of Jesus; Buddhists have relics of the Buddha that are housed in particular temples; Hindus have the River Ganges. These are important focal points for religious practice.

There are also sacred places where miraculous events have taken place in more recent times. In Mexico, the story is told of a native who was baptized into the Catholic Church in 1525 and became known by his Christian name, Juan Diego. According to legend, in 1531, an image of the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego and left a likeness of herself on his cloak. Today, the cloak bearing the image resides in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, a major sacred site. People come to the Basilica for many reasons; some are seeking cures for illness. Juan Diego was made a saint of the Catholic Church in 2002.

Physical and spiritual landscapes intersect in Native American belief systems. Certain places are perceived as sacred sites or *sacred landscapes*, i.e., ancestral burial grounds, mountains and geological formations linked to creation stories, places linked to the collection of plant medicines, areas where tribal ceremonies have been continuously performed, or areas inhabited by spirit forces; the spirit world is always linked to place. Sacred landscapes are sometimes referred to as *sacred geography*.[12] For instance, Mount Shasta is sacred to Modocs, Shastas, and other northern California tribes, as is Blue Lake to the peoples of Taos Pueblo, the Black Hills to Lakotas, Ribbon Falls to Hopis and Zunis, and Rainbow Bridge to Navajos. To the people of Acoma Pueblo, the multilayered cemetery adjoining San Esteban del Rey Mission, built by the Spaniards in 1629, is sacred (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9 San Esteban del Rey Mission, Sky City, Acoma Pueblo.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

Rounded adobe domes sequenced along the top of the cemetery wall represent warriors guarding the spirits of the dead who reside here. Along the far south wall is a portal designed to receive the spirits of eight girls who were captured by Vicente de Zaldívar in January 1599 and taken to Mexico, never to return.

A journey to a sacred place is often referred to as a **pilgrimage**. A pilgrimage can also be a series of rituals associated with a sequence of sacred spaces. In terms of our classification of rituals, each ritual in the sequence of rituals is specifically classified as a *social rite of intensification*, although therapy rituals are often included. In fact, the purpose of a pilgrimage may be to seek a supernatural cure for an illness.

One of the best-known pilgrimage sites in the Christian world is Lourdes, France. From February through July 1858, Bernadette Soubirous witnessed a total of 18 apparitions of the Virgin Mary at a grotto near the town of Lourdes. Today, the grotto is the site of pilgrimages by Catholics and others seeking a cure for illnesses.

A pilgrimage can also be seen as a rite of passage. Such a journey may be a requirement of a religion, and a person returning from a pilgrimage may have achieved a new status or position in the community. The experience of participating in a pilgrimage may include three phases, beginning with *separation* (traveling from one's home to the sacred place or to the beginning of the journey to several sacred places). During the rituals that occur at a sacred site or series of sites, the pilgrim is in a liminal state that is characteristic of the *transition* phase. Finally, at the end, the individual *re-enters* the everyday world, often with some symbol of having participated in the pilgrimage. Note how these stages mirror those of the rites of passage.

Pilgrimages also may involve visiting a number of related sites. One of the best known of such pilgrimages, and certainly one that involves large numbers of participants, is the Islamic *hajj*. The *hajj* is a prescribed visit to a series of sacred sites with specific ritual activities occurring at each one (Box 4.2).

Box 4.2 The *hajj*

One of the Five Pillars of Islam, which form the framework of Muslim life, is the *hajj*, or the pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims who are able to do so are expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. The *hajj* begins on the eighth day of *Dhul-Hijjah* (month for Hajj), the twelfth month of the Islamic year, and lasts for as long

as six days. Every year, pilgrims from all over the world go to Mecca during this month. The *hajj* includes a series of rituals and symbols intended to bring the pilgrim as close as possible to God. A common act during the *hajj* is a constant repetition of the *Shahadah*, or statement of belief. This creed states that "*La ilaha ill-Allah Muhammad-un Rasulu-llah*" ("There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is the Messenger of God").

Although there is some variation, what follows is a basic description of the sequence of events that make up the *hajj*. Before entering Mecca, the pilgrims stop at designated places outside the city to conduct cleansing rituals. As part of this cleansing, men cut their nails, trim their beards, and put on a white seamless garment. (Women also wear white, but no particular dress is prescribed.) By wearing this special clothing, all pilgrims become alike, symbolic of the Islamic belief that all Muslims are equal before God regardless of social status or wealth. This garment is also like a burial shroud, which symbolizes dying or turning away from earthly life to devote all attention to God.

The pilgrims then move into the Great Mosque, which can hold up to 500,000 pilgrims at a time. Here, the pilgrims walk around the Kaaba seven times. The Kaaba is a black stone that stands 13 meters (43 feet) high, engraved with the sacred names of Allah. It was already a sacred object in Mecca before the time of Mohammad. The Qur'an says that Abraham and Ishmael built the Kaaba together, and it is also thought to be the site of Adam's original place of worship.

The pilgrims then travel to the plain of Mina, three miles from Mecca. According to the Qur'an, Mina and other sites, such as Arafat, are places where the word of God was revealed through Mohammad. After going to Mina, the pilgrims move on to the Arafat Valley, where Muslims believe Mohammad delivered his last sermon. The pilgrims gather stones and return to Mina. The stones are thrown at the *Jamraat*, three pillars that represent places where Satan tried to tempt Abraham from following the path of Allah. This act is symbolic of Abraham throwing stones at Satan when Satan tried to dissuade Abraham from sacrificing his son. Also related to this event is the ritual sacrifice of a sheep. This is seen as a reminder of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son, even though God's mercy allowed the substitution of a ram. The meat is distributed to family, friends, and the needy. Finally, the pilgrims return to the Great Mosque to circle the Kaaba again.

After completion of the rituals, the pilgrims re-enter normal life. They cut their hair, feast, and may engage in sexual intercourse. On returning home, they often wear special clothing, are given a special title, and assume important positions within their religious communities.

The Huichol pilgrimage

Huichols are a Native American people living in the Sierra Madre Occidental of central Mexico (Mesoamerican culture area). A key element of their religious traditions is the annual journey of more than 300 miles to Wirikuta, an area located east of their villages.

This is a sacred journey. It re-enacts the journey of the Ancient Ones, the Huichol ancestors, which took place during the creation of their world.

During the dry season, between October and February, small groups of pilgrims, each led by a shaman, leave their villages to travel to Wirikuta. Many objects are collected and prepared for the journey, including candles, small yarn paintings, coins, and special arrows. Each pilgrim assumes the role of one of the Ancient Ones. This is more than play-acting, for they *become* the gods they represent. The shaman leading the pilgrimage becomes Grandfather Fire.

As the Huichol pilgrims journey on foot (or today partly by bus or truck), they visit a number of sacred sites, such as water holes and caves. At each of these places, the story of the journey of the Ancient Ones and their visit to the sacred place is retold. Offerings are made and prayers are recited as social rites of intensification are performed.

Finally, they reach the sacred land, where they find the peyote cactus, the "footprint of the deer." After being ritually "killed" and after offerings have been made, the cactus is collected and eaten. Peyote contains the psychoactive alkaloid *mescaline*. The Huichols believe that, by eating the peyote, they "see what the gods see." (The use of psychotropics in religious rituals is discussed in Chapter 5.)

Zuni quadrennial pilgrimages

Approximately 110 miles southwest of Zuni Pueblo is a spring-fed lake in Arizona where the Zuni and Little Colorado rivers conjoin. Known to locals as Lake of the Whispering Water, Zunis call it *Kolhu/wala:wa*, "Zuni Heaven." They believe that the *kokko* (katsinas) live at the bottom of the lake, and when someone dies, their spirit joins the other katsinas living there in *Kolhu/wala:wa* Village. Through prayers and offerings, the ancestors are summoned to bless their communities with rain to bring good crops, and in return, the katsinas have to be nourished through prayer and ritual.

Every four years, 40 to 60 Zunis pilgrimage along *Weisak'yaya Onnane*, "Barefoot Trail," to *Kolhu/wala:wa* to offer prayers to the ancestors designed to bring rain, as well as peace, order, and prosperity to Zunis and the rest of the world. These quadrennial pilgrimages have occurred for centuries, and some believe that Francisco Vásquez de Coronado disrupted a pilgrimage in 1540. In 1984, 11,000 acres surrounding Zuni Heaven became tribal property, though an Arizona landowner thwarted their access across his lands. Based on the testimonies of tribal elders, archaeologists, historians, and other experts, a federal judge ordered that Zuni pilgrims could traverse his property every four years around the time of the summer solstice.[13]

Religious obligations

There are a number of simple religious ritual acts that may be performed by an individual or a small group, such as a family. A Christian might say "grace" before eating a meal. A Jew entering a building might kiss the *mezuzah*, a small case attached to the doorframe housing a parchment with verses from the Torah. A Buddhist might light a candle in a household shrine.

There are other ceremonial obligations that might not involve obvious ritual activity but do entail a series of obligations and avoidances of particular objects, foods, and activities that are found in daily life. For example, virtually all cultures have certain foods that are served only on ceremonial occasions. These are often associated with symbolic feasting to memorialize and celebrate the religious ritual. Other foods may be forbidden to all members of the community or certain members of the society at particular points in time.

Tabu

It is not unusual that across cultures some objects and people may be off limits and may be said to be **tabu**. The term *tabu* also refers to inappropriate modes of interpersonal behaviors. These are often phrased in terms of pollution. It would bring dishonor, bad luck, or some other negative result for a person to have contact with someone or something considered tabu.

Things that are sacred can be thought of as possessing supernatural power and are, therefore, off-limits to most individuals. Contact with the supernatural can be dangerous and may require ritual acts. In some religious traditions, priests must perform rituals to safeguard themselves and the community against this danger. This is not malicious power. It is neutral, like electricity. If you stick a wet finger into an electric socket, you will receive a large jolt of electricity, and perhaps you will die. The electricity is not evil, but it is powerful. When properly harnessed, it can be used to light our homes, run machinery, and so forth.

One of the most sacred objects in the Torah is the ark that carried the stone tablets from Mount Sinai to Jerusalem to be installed in the Temple. The journey of the ark to Jerusalem was not a simple one, and many of the episodes that occurred on this journey illustrate how dangerous the ark was. Not only was the ark a sacred object, but God had also declared that only Aaron and his descendants were allowed to touch it. On one occasion, as the ark approached the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen pulling the cart that carried the ark stumbled. One of the followers, Uzzah, reached out to steady the ark. After all, it would have been a sacrilege to let the ark fall to the ground. Yet we are told that Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:7). In other words, Uzzah's death was not the result of evil intent. In fact, his steadying of the ark was a good thing, but his contact with such a holy object, in the absence of ritual, resulted in his death.

The response to breaking a tabu is thought to be automatic rather than the decision of a deity. Sometimes, nothing can be done to save the individual who has broken the tabu, but often there are ritual means of mending the situation.

Mana and tabu *in Polynesia*

The concept of *tabu* in Polynesia can be seen in the etiquette surrounding the chief. Again, this relates to the idea that things that possess supernatural power can be dangerous and are often best avoided. In Polynesia, this supernatural power is described by the term

mana. Mana is an impersonal supernatural force concentrated in special places in the landscape, in particular objects, and in certain people.

In some cases, it is possible for an individual to gain or manipulate mana, thus tapping into a source of supernatural power that can then be used for some purpose. Frequently, mana is granted to a person by a supernatural being. In Polynesia, mana comes from the gods. As a direct descendant of the gods, the chief has the most mana, followed by his relatives and so on down through the hierarchy. Mana does flow from one thing to another, but it is part of the chief's role to be a reservoir and conductor of mana.

However, because of the chief's great amount of mana, he constitutes an involuntary menace to those around him, who have a lesser capacity for mana. Thus, many tabus are in place to protect others from this power. Not only is it tabu to touch the chief, but because the chief's mana also runs into everything he uses, it also is dangerous to use his furniture or even use his fire for cooking. In former times, the chief was even carried around on a litter because if he walked on a path with his own feet, the path became forever dangerous, or tabu, to commoners.

Jewish food laws as religious ritual

Many cultures have complex systems of food prohibitions. These prohibitions may apply to the entire community or only to individuals of a particular age, gender, or social position.

Kashrut is the Jewish law regarding what foods can and cannot be eaten and how foods must be prepared. *Kashrut* comes from the Hebrew root *Kaf-Shin-Resh*, meaning fit, proper, or correct. The more commonly known word *kosher* comes from the same root. Kosher foods are those that are proper according to the *kashrut*. Food that is not kosher is referred to as *treyf*. Although some have tried to analyze these rules in terms of early health regulations (an etic perspective), Jews who observe these dietary laws do so because the Torah says to do so (an emic perspective). Rules similar to the Jewish dietary laws are also found in Islam, in which permitted foods are *halal* and prohibited foods are *haram*.

The rules for keeping kosher include eating only land mammals that have cloven hoofs and chew their cud. ("Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat" [Leviticus 11:3].) This is why eating pork is not allowed.

Even animals that are allowed to be eaten must be slaughtered ritually. This ritual slaughter, a quick, deep stroke across the animal's throat with a perfectly sharp blade, is known as *shechitah* and is performed by a ritual specialist, a *shochet*. This method is believed to be the most humane method of slaughter possible. It ensures a rapid and complete draining of the blood as well, which is also a kosher rule. The prohibition of the consumption of blood is the only dietary law that has a reason given in the Torah: The life of the animal is contained in the blood. ("Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people" [Leviticus 7:26–27].)

Many of these obligations serve to provide a social identity to a group and clearly separate that community from its neighbors. They also serve to separate different subgroups from one another in a multicultural society. For example, members of a particular group

might wear special clothing that marks them as members of that group, such as wearing a turban or other head covering, or might alter the appearance of their body, such as growing a beard. Particular behaviors and food prohibitions also serve as symbols of group identity and barriers to social interactions between different social units. If you cannot eat with someone, it becomes difficult to engage in close social interactions. Such ritual prohibitions play important roles in defining religious groups and keeping them intact.

Box 4.3 Menstrual *tabus*

One common category of tabus found cross-culturally is menstrual tabus. Common rules include spending time in menstrual huts, refraining from cooking or eating certain foods, restricting contact with males (especially in regard to sex), and bathing in special locations and/or times. Many of these tabus separate women from men and may be seen as protecting men from possible pollution as well as highlighting the procreative powers of women.

The Mehinakus, an Amazonian group, tells the following myth about the origins of menstruation.

> A long time ago the Sun (Kama) wanted to have sex with Spirit Woman (Apapainyeineju). Oh, but her labia were long. The Sun took her by the wrist and said, "Let's have sex!" To which she replied, "Ah, not me. My vagina is very dangerous and frightening. Inside there is stinging ant, Mein. Inside there are snakes, such as Mekhe and others. Inside is Scorpion, Yucapanu. If it gets you, then you will really be sick. There are many of these between my labia too. I am really dangerous and frightening."
>
> The Sun went into the forest and returned with fish poison and dredged it into Spirit Woman's vagina, just as he would have done into a pool. Out floated all of the dangerous animals. Out came the snakes, then the spiders, and the scorpion. All of these came out but one tiny piranha that remained lodged deep inside her.
>
> "This is good," said the Sun, and he gave tiny piranha to all the women. Each month the piranha bite the women and make them bleed. Sometimes, the woman can feel the piranha bite, and tell their husbands, "Soon I am going to have my period."[14]

As seen in the myth, for the Mehinakus, female genitalia is seen as a source of danger and possible injury. This remains true beyond mythic times as menstruating women are seen as contaminating food, which can cause an illness with chest pains and a cough. Although this illness is not serious for women, it is for men and can even cause death.

Menstrual tabus are found in the world religions as well. In Judaism, menstrual blood is considered ritually unclean. Leviticus 18:19 states, "Also thou shalt not approach unto a woman to uncover her nakedness, as long as she is put apart for her uncleanness," and women are forbidden from making any physical contact with men during menstruation and for the week following. At the end of this time, the woman immerses herself in a *mikvah*, a ritual bath.

Restrictions for Muslim women are for religious functions only and are based on the Qur'an 2:22, which states, "They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say it is an illness so let women alone at such times and go not into them until they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you." A menstruating woman may not enter a shrine or mosque and may not pray, fast, or touch or recite from the Qur'an. She must refrain from sex and complete a ritual washing before she is considered clean again.

Conclusion

In the last few chapters, we have introduced many basic concepts in the study of religion, such as worldview, narratives, symbols, and rituals. As we progress through the book and discuss new ideas and practices, it is important to keep in mind how these different elements are related to one another. In this chapter, we added ritual as an element of religious practice.

We defined a religious ritual as a repetitive, patterned act that involves the manipulation of religious symbols. On another level, we see that rituals are often re-enactments of, or directly reference, specific religious narratives. In the examples in this chapter, we saw that Navajo sandpaintings represent important religious stories, that the Huichol pilgrimage retraces the path of the Ancient Ones as told in religious narratives, and that the Jewish Passover ritual is based on the book of Exodus, just to name a few.

Ritual itself is an essential component of religious practice. The ritual expresses important worldviews through the retelling of sacred narratives and the manipulation of fundamental symbols. Participation in a ritual is usually a group event and constitutes an expression not just of the beliefs of the group but also of group solidarity. In the next chapter, in our discussion of altered states of consciousness, we will further discuss the important psychological impact of rituals. In the words of Anthony Wallace, "Ritual is religion in action; it is the cutting edge of the tool . . . It is ritual which accomplishes what religion sets out to do."[15]

Summary

A *religious ritual* is a standardized, repetitive sequence of activities that involves the manipulation of religious symbols such as prayers, offerings, and readings of sacred literature. Rituals are often based on and are sanctioned in myths that articulate the underlying

worldview of a culture, and these tenets are embedded in the rituals performed by a society. *Prescriptive rituals* are ones that are required to be performed by a religious authority; *situational rituals* are performed because of a particular need of an individual or a community. *Periodic rituals* are performed as part of a religious calendar, and *occasional rituals* are performed when a particular need arises.

There are many types of rituals. *Technological rituals* attempt to influence or control nature, such as rites of intensification that influence nature in the quest for food, protective rituals that serve to protect individuals in some dangerous or unpredictable activity, and divination rituals that help identify possible causes of disease and illness. *Therapy rituals* are healing rituals; anti-therapy rituals are performed to bring about illness and death. *Ideological rituals* serve to maintain the normal functioning of a society. These include the familiar social rite of intensification that reinforces religious and social beliefs and values and the rite of passage that marks an individual's movement from one status to another. *Rites of passage* include birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death rituals and many secular rituals such as graduations, inaugurations, and coronations. Three phases can usually be identified within a rite of passage: separation, transition, and reincorporation.

In addition to these, there are many small rituals and obligations that are demanded of adherents of particular religions. This includes the concept of *tabu*. Things that are tabu are separated from the society and are often considered to be sacred.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 4.

Study questions

1. What are the functions of ritual in our individual and collective lives? Why is ritual an important element across cultures?
2. What is an age set? In what age sets are you a member? Consider various institutions such as healthcare (pediatrics?), education, political/civic organizations (voting? driving?), and religion.
3. Secular rituals are part of our daily lives. Describe your (ordinary) day based on rituals performed in your home, workplace, or school.
4. Consider your college experience as a rite of passage. Describe your experience (or projected experience) of the stages of this rite of passage—separation, transition, and incorporation. Which stage are you in now?
5. If possible, attend a public ceremony or ritual (e.g., ethnic dances, sporting events, religious services) and describe how people dress and behave. What ritual obligations do you observe? What is the purpose of this ceremony, and what are the various roles individuals have?
6. Disasters and human suffering often precipitate religious rituals. What types of tragedies do you think might generate religious rituals? What forms do these rituals take? What functions do they serve?

Notes

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4 For more on this festival, see www.pbs.org/video/how-the-indigenous-green-corn-ceremony-is-a-matter-of-collec-71g6t8/#:~:text=
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13 E.R. Hart, "Protection of *Kolhu/wala:wa* ('Zuni Heaven'): Litigation and Legislation." In *Zuni and the Courts: A Struggle for Sovereign Land Rights*, E.R. Hart, ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pp. 199–207.
14 T. Gregor, *Anxious Pleasures: The Sexual Lives of an Amazonian People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 142.
15 Wallace, op. cit., p. 102.

Chapter 5

Altered states of consciousness

Religion is a system of beliefs and behaviors that deals with the relationship between humans and the sacred supernatural. In interacting with the supernatural world, an individual may have experiences that transcend ordinary experiences, such as a trance or hallucination. These religious experiences are *subjective*; they manifest themselves on an emotional and psychological level. These emotions range from fear and anxiety to a generalized feeling of well-being or even a profound experience in which a person feels an association with supernatural power or a supernatural entity such as a spirit or a god.

These experiences are called **altered states of consciousness,** and they are important elements in religious practices. In its simplest sense, an altered state of consciousness is any mental state that is recognized by the individual or observer as differing from a normal state. Daydreaming and the feeling that comes from drinking a little too much alcohol are examples of mental states that can be subjectively identified by the individual and/or seen by observers as being different from that individual's normal, alert mental state. Although everyone experiences altered states of consciousness to some degree in religious and nonreligious contexts, in many cultures, these states are encouraged and are interpreted by the culture as important religious experiences.

The nature of altered states of consciousness

The definition of an altered state of consciousness is a subjective one that includes a wide variety of phenomena. Table 5.1 lists some of the experiences that characterize altered states. Which particular mental state is experienced and the intensity of that experience depends on a number of factors, including the agent or cause for an individual entering an altered state, the context of the experience (also called the *setting*), the individual's and society's expectations (sometimes called the *set*), and the physical and mental condition of the individual.

Entering an altered state of consciousness

Altered states of consciousness can be brought about by a number of physiological, psychological, and pharmaceutical factors. Table 5.2 lists a number of situations that can bring about an altered state of consciousness. Many of these factors occur in religious practices and are given a religious interpretation.

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Table 5.1 Characteristics of altered states of consciousness

Alterations in thinking	• disturbances in concentration, attention, memory, and judgment • reality testing impaired to varying degrees • distinction between cause and effect blurred
Disturbed time sense	• altered sense of time and chronology • feelings of timelessness or time speeding up or slowing down and coming to a standstill
Loss of control	• fear of losing grip on reality and self-control • feelings of helplessness • in spirit possession states, the person may relinquish control
Change in emotional expression	• sudden and unexpected displays of emotional extremes • individuals may become detached and uninvolved
Body image change	• distortion in body image • a schism between body and mind • dissolution of boundaries between self and others and the universe; various parts of the body appear or feel shrunken, enlarged, distorted, heavy, weightless, disconnected • spontaneous experiences of dizziness, blurring of vision
Perceptual distortions	• hallucinations or increased visual imagery • synaesthesia, in which one form of sensory experience is translated into another form, such as in seeing or feeling sound
Change in meaning or significance	• attach increased meaning or significance to experiences • feelings of perceptiveness and insight
Sense of an indescribable experience	• inability to communicate the experience to someone who has not undergone a similar experience • varying degrees of amnesia or sometimes a lucid memory
Feelings of rejuvenation	• experience a new sense of hope and rebirth; contradictions, doubts, inconsistencies, and inhibitions tend to diminish • hypersuggestibility, in which the person comes to rely more on the suggestions of the religious practitioner

Source: Based on A.M. Ludwig, "Altered States of Consciousness," in C. Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), pp. 9–22.

Table 5.2 Factors stimulating an altered state of consciousness

Production of altered state of consciousness	*Examples*
Reduction of external stimulation and/or motor activity	Solitary confinement, prolonged social and stimulus deprivation
Constant exposure to repetitive stimulation	Prolonged drumming or repetitive dance movements (e.g., whirling dervishes)
Increase of external stimulation (sensory overload) and/or strenuous physical activity	Third-degree tactics, spirit possession states, ecstatic trance
Increased alertness or mental involvement sustained over time	Prolonged vigilance, intense mental absorption in a task
Decreased alertness; passive state of mind	Meditation, daydreaming, cognitive and muscular relaxation
Alterations in body chemistry or physiology of the nervous system	Hypoglycemia (perhaps due to fasting), dehydration, sleep deprivation, hyperventilation, use of pharmacological substances

Source: Based on A.M. Ludwig, "Altered States of Consciousness," in C. Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), pp. 9–22.

Fasting

Fasting is the act of abstaining from eating food and drinking liquids over a period of time. The concept of fasting may also include other prohibitions, such as that against sexual intercourse and smoking. There is great variation in the nature of a fast. In some societies, the fast includes all food and drink; in some, the drinking of water is permitted. In still other societies, a fast refers to abstaining from a particular food such as meat.

Fasting leads to an alteration in body chemistry. In response to the absence of food intake over an extended period of time, the body turns to alternative means of providing glucose to provide energy. Initially, fat stores in the liver and elsewhere are metabolized. On depletion of the fat stores, the body begins to break down proteins. The feeling of hunger normally disappears after a few days.

Changes in body chemistry accelerate with intense, prolonged fasting, and the fasting individual will show the clinical features of starvation. Severe symptoms of starvation, including death, have occurred in religious fasting; this is a rare, maladaptive outcome. Because most religious fasts last only a day or two or involve some intake of food and water during the fasting period, the features of starvation seldom develop. In intense fasting, the psychological features that are seen include an increase in impulsive and aggressive behavior, a decrease in competence, and hallucinations. Characteristics associated with dehydration include fatigue, lethargy, confusion, and dizziness. Thus, fasting can lead to the development of an altered state.

People express many reactions to fasting in a religious context. Of course, in addition to physiological and psychological features, cultural expectations play a major role. Fasting is often seen as a sacrifice to a deity and frequently accompanies religious rituals. It can be an important element in the training of religious specialists, in which it is seen as a form of discipline. Fasting also accompanies rituals of atonement as an act of cleansing.

There are many instances of fasting in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, Moses fasted for 40 days and 40 nights while he was on the mountain with God. Jesus also fasted for 40 days and 40 nights while in the wilderness.

The Jewish calendar contains a number of fast days. The best known is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. On that day, Jews fast from sunset to sunset the next day. Fasting includes abstinence from all food and drink, including water, as well as other prohibitions, such as that against sexual intercourse and bathing. Fasting is a part of the process of achieving atonement.

Fasting is found in some Christian denominations and absent in others. Fasting accompanies Holy Communion in the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Here, often fasting means abstaining from certain, but not all, foods. Fasting customs vary greatly in Protestant churches and often accompany a personal spiritual experience rather than being a part of a ritual.

Fasting during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, is one of the Pillars of Islam. Fasting includes abstention from food and water from sunup to sundown, as well as abstention from sex and smoking. This act is seen as moving the individual closer to God by abandoning things that are enjoyable. As the community fasts together, people are brought together with a heightened sense of community.

Fasting is also found in some Buddhist sects, and it is an important element of Hindu ritual.

Sacred pain

Altered states of consciousness can also result from pain. Pain is a common theme in religious traditions. It may be a punishment, as in the Christian legacy of Eve bringing forth children in pain ("in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" [Genesis 3:16]), or the Hindu consequences of bad karma. Pain may be seen as purifying, like the ascetics, flagellants, and monks who discipline themselves by imposing strict controls over their bodies to avoid greater torment of the soul in the next life (also called *voluntary ordeals*). Sometimes, it may be an enemy or even a weapon, as with Christ's battle on the cross. Finally, pain may be seen as transformative or as a source of supernatural power—pain purifies and is used to achieve exorcism.

Certain levels of pain have an *analgesic quality*; for instance, when you rub the elbow you just banged on something hard. Pain can also induce a euphoric state through the body's production of natural opiates and may be related to experiences of dissociation or trance. The voluntary ordeals to which shamanic initiates and ascetics submit themselves may be related to this effect. This is also the goal of many participants in modern Western body modification subcultures who practice scarification, branding, piercing, and even suspension (hanging from hooks piercing their skin).

In our society, we tend to think of pain as a very individualistic and even isolating experience. However, religious pain is often *shared pain*. Sometimes, this sharing is vicarious. Christianity provides many examples of the importance of vicarious suffering, including the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the existence of hell, and the public executions of witches and heretics. Some individuals have experienced localized pain in areas of the body that correspond to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus. These perceived marks on the body are known as **stigmata**.

Many rituals use pain that is either self-inflicted or inflicted by others. For example, some funeral rituals involve self-mutilation on the part of mourners (see Chapter 8). Self-inflicted pain is also effective because people often become very focused before performing the act, concentrating on the experience. They may also have undergone a period of purification before the act, which might include fasting or lack of sleep.

Among ancient Mayas, male rulers used small obsidian blades shaped like scorpions or deities and bone awls to perforate the foreskin of their penises, and queens perforated their tongues and drew strings studded with thorns or stingray spines through their tongues (Figure 5.1). Their blood splattered onto strips of bark paper lying in a ceremonial bowl, and then the blood-soaked paper was burned as an offering of one's *ch'ulel*, or soul, to the gods. Intense pain and blood loss induced visions that were interpreted as the entrance of gods and ancestors into the presence of the ruler.

In Chapter 4, we examined rites of passage that included coming-of-age rituals. These rituals often include tattooing, scarring, and circumcision. Because many of these operations are quite painful, the ability to withstand pain is an important element in these rituals. The subject often enters an altered state of consciousness in the course of undergoing such painful procedures in order to withstand the pain that is being inflicted.

Figure 5.1 Maya carving. Stone carvings from Temple 23, Yaxchilán, Mexico, commemorating a ritual performed on October 28, 709 CE, celebrating the birth of Bird-Jaguar. (a) Lintel 24 shows Lady Xoc pulling a rope studded with thorns through her tongue as her husband, Shield-Jaguar, holds a torch. (b) Lintel 25 shows Lady Xoc conjuring a vision of Yaxchilan's patron god, Chac, whose spirit emerges from the mouth of a serpent.

Source: Retained

Pain can also be experienced as healing and transformative. In these cases, pain can be a catalyst for strengthening the person's sense of self. Instead of being isolating, the pain experience may reinforce the person's connections to both the social and supernatural worlds. Prime examples of changes in identity that occur through pain experiences are *possession* and *exorcism*, both of which will be discussed in later chapters.

The interface between fasting, pain, and extreme fatigue to achieve altered states of consciousness occurred in the Plains Indian **vision quest**, a ritual in which an individual sought to interact directly with a spirit or deity. An extreme example is the Mandan Okipa ceremony witnessed by traveler and artist George Catlin in the early 1830s. The vision-seeking candidate went through the four-day-and-night vision quest in preparation for the real ordeal:

> Already greatly weakened from hunger and thirst and four consecutive sleepless days and nights, the candidates had holes pierced with knives through the flesh of their shoulders or breasts. Through these holes they were suspended by skewers and thongs from the center pole of the great Medicine Lodge. The vision seeker's shield, bow, quiver, and other belongings were suspended from still more skewers passed through other parts

> of his body, and in many instances even a heavy bison skull was attached to each arm and leg. Attendants with long poles caused his body to twirl ever faster until the candidate, streaming with blood, passed out from the pain, his medicine bag dropping from his hands and his body hanging apparently lifeless. He was then lowered to the ground and allowed to recover, but the ordeal was not over. There was still the sacrifice of the little finger of his left hand (which was chopped off and offered to the Great Spirit), to be followed by a furious race around an altar, with the bison skulls and other weights dragging behind the candidate, until he could endure no more and fell in a dead faint. With that collapse, the purpose of the ordeal—that took place in connection with the great Sun Dance festival at the end of the summer bison hunt—was accomplished.[1]

Although non-Indians interpreted the Okipa ceremony as a rite of passage into manhood, it was an extreme form of achieving an ecstatic vision. According to Peter Furst, altered states of consciousness in Native North America were obtained by various non-chemical triggers:

> fasting, thirsting, self-mutilation, torture, exposure to the elements, sleeplessness, incessant dancing and other means of total exhaustion, bleeding, plunging into ice-cold pools, near-drowning, laceration with thorns and animal teeth, and other painful ordeals, as well as a variety of nonhurtful "triggers," such as different kinds of rhythmic activity, self-hypnosis, meditation, chanting, drumming, and music.[2]

A pilgrimage (see Chapter 4) often involves sacred pain that may be interpreted as a sacrifice, an imitation of the suffering of a god, a penance, or a test. This pain is often related to an altered state of consciousness. In the pilgrimage to Sabarimala in South India (Figure 5.2), the pilgrim follows the path of the god Lord Ayyappan, son of Shiva, and his encounter with, and defeat of, a female demon. Pilgrims commit themselves to celibacy, moderate eating, walking with bare feet, and sleeping on the ground. The pilgrimage is a 40-mile journey, walked barefoot over sharp stones and hot sand. This pain is seen as an essential part of the pilgrimage, the goal of which is becoming one with Ayyappan. The following is a description by pilgrim E. Valentine Daniel:

Figure 5.2 Temple at Sabarimala, Kerala, India; in the Lord Ayyapan pilgrimage to this temple, devotees practice various forms of strict self-discipline.

Source: Alamy

> One tells oneself, "I shall walk on this side or that" or "Look! There's a patch of grass. Let me go walk on that. It will make my feet feel good, even though the patch is only three feet long." During this phase, one is able to differentiate between

the pain caused by the blisters under one's toenails and those on one's heels. Then again, one is able to distinguish between the pain caused by blisters, wherever they happen to be, and the pain arising from strained calf muscles and tendons . . . The headaches caused by the heat of the noon sun and the load of the *iru muti* can be distinguished from the pain resulting from the straps of the knapsack biting into one's shoulders.

Sooner or later, however, all the different kinds of pain begin to merge . . . The experience of pain makes one acutely aware of oneself (ego) as the victim, and the outside (undifferentiated as roots, stones, and hot sand) as the pain-causing agent . . . With time, pain stops having a causative agent, and ego is obscured or snuffed out because it has nothing to contrast itself with or stand against . . . There is a "feeling" of pain, of course, but it is a sensation that has no agent, no tense, and no comparative . . . Pain is the only sensation belonging to the eternal present.[3]

Pilgrimages as painful acts of sacrifice and devotion are found across cultures, including in the U.S. On Good Friday, part of the Christian celebration of Easter, thousands of pilgrims gather at the Santuario de Chimayo in northern New Mexico, where they receive blessings and place a small bit of "holy dirt" on their tongues. The origin of this practice is in the myth of Chimayo: In 1810, a *penitente*, a member of a Catholic brotherhood, found a light beaming from underground in the area where the Santuario is now situated, and when he dug to reach the light, he found a cross. The ground in this same spot is considered holy by the pilgrims.

Some pilgrims travel hundreds of miles, many of them walking a large portion of that distance (Figure 5.3). During this time of travel, the individuals reflect upon Christ's experience of crucifixion (referred to as the Stations of the Cross). As the groups get nearer to the small church, many people begin walking on their knees, arriving bloodied and exhausted.

Figure 5.3 Pilgrims arriving at the Santuario de Chimayo; note the ambulance available to attend to pilgrims exhausted by the travel.

Source: Wikimedia

The biological basis of altered states of consciousness

Participants in religious rituals may report being possessed by a spirit or visited by an angel; they may feel their souls move outside their bodies; they may become one with the universe. These are real and profound experiences. But what is occurring within the brains of these individuals? Is there a biological basis for these altered states of consciousness?

Neurologist Oliver Sacks and others have looked at the relationship between migraines and religious experiences.[4] The term *migraine* is generally used to describe a type of headache, but migraines are also associated with nausea and other physical symptoms. One symptom is an *aura*, a type of hallucination. Although auras are most often visual, they may also involve distortions of other senses.

Culture plays a major role in how the patient interprets an aura. A modern migraine sufferer might experience a visual aura as pathological, a condition that makes it difficult to function—for example, to drive a car. (An aura that consists of floating lights, for example, can severely interfere with normal vision.) The same visual experience, however, could be interpreted as a vision in other cultures. In fact, descriptions of visions were written down and illustrated by Hildegard of Bingen, a nun and mystic who lived from 1098 to 1179. Her descriptions and drawings are similar to contemporary descriptions of auras by migraine patients. Thus, a particular experience may be experienced as a medical condition or, if the culture interprets it that way, a mystical experience.

Of course, migraine auras are not consciously induced, as many religious altered states are. Research in neurobiology has focused on how rhythmic, ritualized behavior affects certain parts of the brain. For example, in situations in which a fast rhythm is being used, such as with vigorous singing and dancing, the **sympathetic system,** or arousal system, of the brain is driven to higher and higher levels, ultimately becoming overstimulated. When this happens, the brain essentially selectively shuts down, and certain areas of the brain stop receiving the neural input they normally receive and on which they depend to function normally.

One area of the brain that is altered when overstimulated is a structure known as the **orientation association structure**. This is the part of the brain that enables us to sense the boundaries of our body, distinguish ourselves from the world around us, and orient ourselves in space. These are tasks that we normally take for granted because our brains are functioning well, but the inability to perform these tasks can cause huge difficulties for people who have sustained damage to this part of the brain. Imagine trying to sit down in a chair if you could not tell where you ended and the chair began, or if you did not know exactly where your body was.

The orientation association structure becomes deprived of new information when overstimulated by the arousal system. The result of this is a softening of the boundaries between self and others. This may be responsible for an altered mental state described by many religious systems in which the divisions between the self and the outside world disappear, and one feels as if they were "one" with the universe or supernatural beings. This is referred to as a **unitary state**.

Interestingly, other research has focused on the emotional impact of repetitive motor behaviors (called *stereotypic movements*), including what is referred to as marked actions or actions that are different from normal ordinary movements, such as a slow bow. And some studies have looked at the impact of smell, such as that of burning incense. These studies have found that it is not possible to get the exact same effects as are seen with ritual behavior just by chemically stimulating a specific area of the brain. It is only with the *merging* of beliefs and behaviors (culture) that the full effect is achieved.

Box 5.1 Altered states in Upper Paleolithic art

The Upper Paleolithic [period] of Europe (35,000–10,000 years ago) is the time when the first *Homo sapiens* arrived and replaced the Neandertals. It was a time of new technologies and the development of artistic traditions. Perhaps the most famous art from this era is cave paintings, which are found primarily in France and Spain.

Over the decades, archaeologists and art historians have wrestled with interpreting the meaning of cave art and the role it played for people of the Upper Paleolithic. David Lewis-Williams believes that the art was part of a religious experience and a graphic representation of experiences of altered states of consciousness, either created while in or immediately after coming out of an altered state.

Lewis-Williams points out that when people enter altered states, some experiences appear to be universal because of the biology of the brain. One is the sensation of flying. Another is being drawn into a vortex, often perceived as the entrance to a tunnel that leads to another world, such as an underworld. He theorizes that Upper Paleolithic peoples saw the caves in terms of such experiences. They were the "entrails of the underworld." The walls of the caves were seen as a membrane between the everyday world and the world of the spirits.

Many of the works found on the cave walls incorporate some features of the wall itself, such as a crack or nodule. Often, the painted animals appear to be coming out of the wall. These are spirit-animals, and shamans performed rituals to move these animals through the membrane so the shaman could use the spirit-animal in healing and other activities. This connection to the spirit world on the other side of the membrane can be seen in offerings—such as stone objects and animal teeth—that are wedged into cracks in the wall, thereby sending them into the underworld. Incised lines may also be attempts to penetrate the other side.

In addition to representational images, such as animals, Upper Paleolithic humans painted geometric figures on the cave walls. In moving into a trance state, a person passes through three stages. In the first stage, geometric visual images are seen. These are **entoptic phenomena** and are the forms painted on the cave walls. These images are seen by peoples in all societies, but they are open to cultural interpretation. In the second phase, the individual attempts to make sense of these phenomena and interprets them in cultural terms. These entoptic images are still seen in the third stage, or deep trance. They may combine with iconic images of people and animals that are seen as part of the spirit world. In these deep trances, an individual will often feel changed into an animal able to share in the power of the spirit-animal. Images of transformed shamans are called **therianthropes**.

Sources: D.J. Lewis-Williams and J. Clottes, "The Mind in the Cave—the Cave in the Mind: Altered Consciousness in the Upper Paleolithic," *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 9 (1998), pp. 13–21; D.J. Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

Ethnographic examples of altered states of consciousness

Altered states of consciousness are at the core of many religious experiences and enable the believer to experience the supernatural in a very immediate, visceral way. In the following section, we will see the role of altered states of consciousness in ritual by examining specific ethnographic examples.

San healing rituals

!Kungs are a subgroup of the Sans, foragers of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa (Khoisan culture area).[5] In their healing rituals !Kungs experience *!kia*, which is an altered state of consciousness. According to !Kungs, an energy known as *n/um*, given to them by the gods, resides at the base of the spine. As an individual enters *!kia*, the *n/um* begins to boil and turn to a vapor, which then rises in the spine to a point near the base of the skull. At that point, the individual enters an altered state.

In a large !Kung camp, during the time of year when food is plentiful, dances are held several times a month. As night falls, several women sit down around a large fire and begin to sing. As more women join them in a tight circle around the fire, the singing becomes louder and more energetic. Soon, some of the men and a few women begin to dance around the circle of singers. As the dancing becomes more and more energetic, they become warm and begin sweating profusely. The dancers then start to stagger and shake violently. Having entered *!kia,* they begin their healing by going around the fire and laying their hands on each individual. !Kungs believe that illness is shot into people by the ancestors. By laying hands on a person, they pull out the sickness and throw it into the darkness (Figure 5.4).

Among the Sans, about half of the men and about ten percent of the women become healers. In addition to pulling out illness, a person in an altered state of consciousness can see inside another person and also travel to the home of the spirits. They experience intense emotions and a sense of ascending and flying, which is interpreted as traveling into the heavens.

The Sun Dance of the Cheyennes

The Sun Dance is a major communal religious rite of renewal, personal sacrifice, and power-seeking practiced by many tribal groups in the North American Plains culture area, including Arapahos, Blackfoots, Crows, Kiowas, Sioux, and Cheyennes. Each group has its own particular variations, but there are certain elements common across the different cultures. The Sun Dance takes place near the summer solstice and represents the theme of renewal.

The Cheyenne's name for the Sun Dance, *oxheheom*, means "New Life Lodge" or "Life Generator Lodge." The ritual is closely tied to the creation of the earth in the Cheyenne origin story. One myth tells of a famine that was afflicting the Cheyennes. In response, a culture hero named Tomsivsi (Erect Horns) took the beautiful wife of a tribal chief with him on a journey to Black Mountain, north of Pipestone Quarry in Minnesota. Inside the Sacred Mountain, he was given Esevone, the Sacred Buffalo Hat, and taught the Sun Dance; by performing the dance, the people, the buffalo, and the world would be renewed.

Figure 5.4 San healing ceremony. Healing ritual of the Gwi band, a subgroup of the San, southern Africa. As they dance, the healing force is believed to rise in their bodies and be transmissible from one individual to another.

Source: Retained

The ceremony is pledged by an individual who is making a commitment to the community to endure pain and suffering to achieve an alternate reality. This pledge may be made in hopes of healing a loved one, or a man himself may be sick and vow to do the dance if he recovers. The vow may be made to avert danger in war or may be based on a dream. From the time the man makes his pledge until the end of the ritual, there is a tabu on sexual activity. This again references the myth in which Tomsivsi refrained from having sex with his companion until after he emerged from the Sacred Mountain.

The Sun Dance takes eight days to perform, with the first four days spent building the dance lodge. The center pole for the dance lodge is cut down by a man who interacts with the tree as a warrior interacts with an enemy, and it is ritually transported to the lodge by chiefs. Many ritual acts and offerings to the pole are associated with the raising of the pole. During this time, secret rites are also conducted in the Lone Tipi, which symbolizes the Sacred Mountain where Tomsivsi learned the dance.

The last four days are devoted to the actual public dance, which takes place in the Sun Dance Lodge. The participants in the dance face the center pole and rise up and down on their toes while standing in one place. As they rise, they blow on eagle-wing bone whistles. The dancers do this almost continuously during the entire four-day period. While there may be brief rest periods, the dancers are completely without food or water.

The most dramatic part of the Cheyenne Sun Dance is an act of self-sacrifice known as "hanging from the central pole." A man does this act with the help of a Sun Dancer who has made the same sacrifice in the past. The experienced Sun Dancer fastens a rope to the central pole that reaches just to the chest of the pledger. Two holes are pierced through the pledger's chest, skewers are passed through, and the free ends of the rope are attached to the skewers. The pledger then dances while fastened to the pole, all night trying to break free. If he has not done so by morning, his helper cuts him free. (This is analogous to the Mandan Okipa ceremony described earlier).

Dancers who make this additional sacrifice do so in hopes of gaining pity from supernatural beings in order to be rewarded with good fortune, public approval, and social prestige. The fasting, dancing, and pain all help induce an altered state of consciousness for the dancers, and participants often report having visions during the ritual.

Christian snake-handlers

The film *In Jesus' Name* (1991, Al Clayton) documents snake-handling ceremonies in churches in Georgia and Alabama: www.folkstreams.net/films/in-jesus-name. As you watch these sacred ceremonies, notice the various ***drivers*** that are prompting individuals to experience an altered state of consciousness (e.g., music, prayer, dance, lighting, and fellow believers). The set and the setting are clearly marked in the services.

In 2011, photographer Lauren Pond was invited to document snake-handling services at a Pentecostal Holiness church in West Virginia. While there, she witnessed (and documented) the service in which Pastor Mack Wolford was fatally bitten. Her photo journal of this moving event can be accessed at www.popphoto.com/american-photo/lauren-ponds-intimate-view-west-virginia-serpent-handlers/. Snake-handling is an example of a very tactile approach to faith.

The Holiness churches

Holiness churches are a series of independent churches found primarily in Appalachia, most predominantly in West Virginia. Once highly dependent on coal mining, this region of the United States was relatively isolated and economically depressed. Although some of this remains true today, the isolation is breaking down, and life is improving for many families. Holiness churches continue to be part of the cultural landscape of many areas, however. Each church is independent, yet individuals frequently visit and participate with several churches in the region, especially during ritual celebrations. The rituals do not follow a set pattern, although many elements are highly traditional, and the sequence of activities is determined largely by the elders of the church community. These practices are based on a specific passage of the Bible:

> And he [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.
>
> (Mark 16: 15–18)

During the service, it is not uncommon for members of the congregation to enter an altered state of consciousness through intense concentration in prayer and with loud music with a repetitive beat. Individuals dance and pray energetically, often entering a focused trance-like state. In some Holiness churches participants practice snake-handling and drink poison (usually strychnine) to demonstrate their faith. Entrance into an altered state is a highly desired religious experience and is interpreted as being filled by the Holy Ghost. This is an example of a unitary state.

Individuals may also "speak in tongues," interpreted as the voice of God speaking through the person. Known as **glossolalia**, this spiritual language uses the sounds, rhythms, and accents of the speaker's native language. The sounds are broken up into syllables that are put together unsystematically into units that resemble words and sentences but are not. In some cases, individuals begin speaking other non-English languages that they had not learned previously.

Hallucinogen-induced altered states of consciousness

Thus far, we have examined the use of non-chemical triggers like pain and fasting to achieve altered states of consciousness. However, in many societies, psychoactive or psychotropic plants and substances (also called **hallucinogens**) are used for altered states of consciousness. Hallucinogenic plants distort the senses and usually produce *hallucinations* (experiences that depart from reality). Typical hallucinations are visual, although they often affect the other four senses—hearing, touch, smell, and taste, sometimes simultaneously.

Hallucinogens were once classified as narcotics because some of them depress the central nervous system. However, most hallucinogens are not dangerous or addictive, as are narcotics. Hallucinogens affect the senses and produce changes in mood and perception, and users typically are sensitive to their emotional and physical environment. Significantly, the cultural context (setting) of ingesting psychotropics is critical. Robert S. de Ropp relates how Richard Alpert, a colleague of LSD advocate Timothy Leary, visited a guru in the Himalayan foothills and fed him 915 micrograms of Alpert's specially prepared LSD. Though 100 micrograms would have given anyone else a strong trip, the guru was not affected. Society's learned expectations, not chemistry, are the independent variable responsible for much of the pharmacological action of hallucinogens. There is a strong correlation between nature and culture, that is, "between chemistry, mind-set, and social and historical setting."[6] As we saw earlier in this chapter, it is the *merging* of behavior and belief that leads to specific altered states of consciousness.

Box 5.2 Peyote in the Native American Church

Following the conclusion of the Red River War in May 1875, the Kiowas, Comanches, and Plains Apaches (KCA Indians) were confined to a reservation in present-day southwestern Oklahoma. Formerly equestrian foragers and raiders, they became totally dependent on government rations after the Southern Plains bison herds became extinct a few years later. Concomitantly, assimilationist federal Indian policy focused on liquidating tribal landholdings through allotment in severalty, breaking up

tribalism and the family through education, and eliminating ceremonies and dances and replacing them with Christianity. These acts of cultural genocide spawned several new religions, including prophet movements, the Ghost Dance, and the Peyote rite (revitalization movements are discussed in Chapter 12).

Peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*), a small, green, spineless cactus that grows in clusters of "buttons" from a taproot, is found on both sides of the Rio Grande River; only the Peyote gardens near Laredo, Texas, however, are accessible. Scholars believe the nascent Peyote rite spread from the Coahuiltecan-speaking Carrizos to Mescalero and Lipan Apaches to Kiowas and Comanches by 1850. By the mid-1880s, the Peyote rite was widespread on the KCA Reservation, from whence the new religion diffused to tribes beyond southwestern Oklahoma. Fused with older traditions, Peyotism aligns with Indigenous beliefs and practices. Peyote is a medicine that heals, teaches, and embraces spiritual and ethical lifestyles.

Schultes called Peyote a divine messenger to God after identifying mescaline and peyotine as the anhalonium alkaloids that produce kaleidoscopic color visions. Congregants in Peyote meetings assemble around 9:00 p.m. on a Saturday night until noon the following day. Sitting cross-legged around the perimeter of a tipi with a crescent-shaped fireplace in the middle—Half Moon variant—they eat dried Peyote buttons, sing Peyote songs, and pray all night, accompanied by a water drum. Supplicants say that Peyote helps them concentrate on their prayers as they seek pity from God through physical deprivation—sitting cross-legged, eating a bitter herb, and singing songs harsh on the throat without water breaks. Meetings are held to celebrate birthdays and holidays, bless soldiers and veterans, and heal the sick.

Largely misunderstood and stereotyped by outsiders, proposed legislation compelled Peyotists in Oklahoma to charter as the Native American Church in 1918. Proposed anti-Peyote bills in Congress failed in 1918 and 1937, and a 1990 U.S. Supreme Court decision threatened First Amendment protection of the Peyote religion. Fortunately, members of the Native American Church are now protected after the passage of the 1994 American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments.

Anthropologist Weston LaBarre (1911–1996), along with ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes (1915–2001), pioneered the study of hallucinogenic plants in the 1930s. During the summer of 1936, LaBarre, a graduate student at Columbia University, collaborated with Schultes, an undergraduate botany student at Harvard University, to conduct a joint study on the ritual use of peyote (*Lophophora williamsii)* (Figure 5.5). In 1937, both scholars testified to Congress about the positive effects of peyote use, ultimately defeating anti-peyote legislation that would have threatened the legal sanctity of the Peyote religion. The same year, LaBarre published his *The Peyote Cult* (1938), now considered a classic in psychological anthropology.

Afterward, Schultes studied other psychotropic plants in Oaxaca, Mexico. Following the outbreak of World War II, he received funding to seek much-needed rubber in the Amazon. Living in Indigenous communities in lowland South America, Schultes documented the use of

psychotropic plants, including the ritual use of the hallucinogenic beverage ayahuasca (or yagé), derived from the jungle vine *Banisteriopsis*. Schultes is known as the father of modern ethnobotany.

LaBarre and Schultes hypothesized that compared to many parts of the world, Indigenous peoples of the Americas are more predisposed toward seeking a shamanic ecstatic experience. After the Neolithic Revolution in the Old World (ca. 10,000 years ago), Old World religions underwent dramatic changes due to socioeconomic and ideological developments and began to develop extreme practices. In the New World, however, peoples never demonstrated the religious fanaticism of Old World religions, particularly Islam and Christianity. In contrast, New World peoples, primarily aligned with a foraging lifestyle, did not develop the idea that religions were mutually exclusive, even among the Mesoamerican civilizations, such as the Toltecs, Aztecs, and Mayas. Indigenous Native Americans, therefore, were free to explore religious expression on a more individual basis.[7]

Figure 5.5 Peyote is used by various Indigenous groups as a sacrament. Peyote is native to the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico.

Source: Wikimedia

Figure 5.6 Fly agaric mushroom; this hallucinogen is commonly used in Siberian shamanism.

Source: Wikimedia

LaBarre and Schultes also believed that older shamanic traditions of Siberia and Inner Asia were brought across the Beringia land bridge to the New World intact, with the ecstatic experience as the central feature of shamanism. One of the characteristics of Siberian shamanism is the use of *Amanita muscaria*, or fly agaric mushroom, considered the oldest known hallucinogen in the world. Some have hypothesized that its use contributed to human perceptions of deity. The mushroom, which grows in northern temperate regions of Eurasia, has a very beautiful deep orange to blood-red cap flecked with white scales and contains very strong hallucinogens (Figure 5.6). The name "fly agaric" derives from its use in Europe as a fly killer; mushrooms left in open dishes stunned flies that landed on them.

Siberian peoples who used fly agaric include Finno-Ugrian peoples of western Siberia (Ostyaks and Voguls) and northeastern Siberian peoples (Chuckchees, Koryaks, and Kamchadals). The mushroom was eaten or taken with reindeer milk. An unusual practice was the ritualistic drinking of urine from men who had eaten the mushroom. The active ingredients of the mushroom pass through the body unchanged, and consumption of the urine allows an individual to have a hallucinogenic experience. According to Schultes, pharmacological reaction induces

> a condition marked usually by twitching, trembling, slight convulsions, numbness of the limbs, and a feeling of ease characterized by happiness, a desire to sing and dance, colored visions, and macropsia (seeing things greatly enlarged). Violence giving way to a deep sleep may occasionally occur. Participants are sometimes overtaken by curious beliefs, such as that experienced by an ancient tribesman who insisted that he had just been born! Religious fervor often accompanies the inebriation.[8]

Ethnobotanists have identified fly agaric as the *soma* (a religious drink) of ancient India. Hymns from the Rig-Veda—a collection of 1,028 hymns dating back to the second millennium BCE—worship soma and describe the effects of the plant. The Vedas also mention the ritualistic drinking of urine. Fly agaric is perhaps the oldest used hallucinogen in the world.

It is believed that after migrating to the New World, American Indians likely sought the ecstatic experience wherever it was available. In the tropics of Mexico, Central, and South America, they found many species of hallucinogenic plants. In total, Indians of the Americas utilized between 80 and 100 hallucinogenic plants. South America serves as the best example for explaining the link between shamanism and hallucinogenic plants.

Shamanism in South America

South American Indigenous shamans almost exclusively use botanical hallucinogens to achieve the ecstatic trance. After taking these substances, the soul "journeys" into the Underworld. Extensive use of hallucinogens has been noted, and shamans consume more than the average person. Shamans are the central focal point of South American Indigenous societies, for they serve as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds.

While North American Indigenous shamans primarily use drums as the driver to achieve an ecstatic state, South American Indigenous shamans tend to rely on the *gourd rattle*, which symbolizes the link between the physical and spiritual worlds. It also represents the World Tree, or *axis mundi,* that links Underworld with Upperworld. The hollow gourd represents the cosmos; the staff represents the cosmic pathway of the world tree; and the seeds or small stones represent the spirits the shaman activates while shaking the instrument. The shaking of the rattle, along with chants taught to the shaman by the spirits, allows them to concentrate on flight or descent to other worlds or realms.[9]

Another significant trait of South American shamanism is the identification between the shaman and the *jaguar*, a motif that crosses linguistic, geographical, and cultural boundaries and is also widespread in pre-Columbian Mexico (see Figure 1.3 in Chapter 1). According to Peter Furst, "Jaguar transformation and the use of plant hallucinogens, in turn, are ideologically and experientially linked." Under the guidance of the shaman, members of the community will use psychotropic plants to experience ecstasy, but the shaman alone

has the power to transform into a jaguar. It is believed that jaguars are transformed shamans, sometimes even serving as the soul bearers of deceased shamans. One does not kill a jaguar without fearing supernatural consequences.[10]

Shamans and jaguars are alike in that they are the only individuals not confined to a single realm or niche. They both *journey*. The jaguar

> is nocturnal and inhabits caves, behaviors that associate it with the underworld. It hunts principally on land but is so well adapted to water and so expert a swimmer in pursuit of fish and aquatic game that many Indian mythologies tell of powerful "water jaguars" that spend their lives in the watery underworld to which only shamans have access. Finally, in the manner of the shaman ascending the tree as metaphorical world axis, the jaguar is an agile climber of the great forest trees.[11]

Bird symbolism is another religious motif in South America linked to the use of psychotropic plants. Highly prized are the bright feathers of parrots, macaws, and other tropical birds, whose feathers are used for feather crowns, wands, and prayer sticks. The meaning of the feathers goes beyond flight to imply the significance of "light" associated with the nocturnal séance, in which the shaman's headdress is believed to emit light and brightness. Light, activated by hallucinogens and chants, provides the communication link between the physical and supernatural realms.[12]

Perhaps the best-known psychotropics from South America are *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *B. inebrians*, gigantic wooden vines with tiny pink flowers that hang from trees. Throughout the western Amazon (Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia), a hallucinogenic drink called *yagé* or *ayahuasca* is made from these woody vines. Both concoctions are very bitter and nauseating. Pharmacologically, people are affected differently, especially since preparations of the drink differ regionally. Reported effects range from a sense of intoxication to vomiting, hallucinations, tachycardia, and seizures. Color hallucinations are typical, and large doses can produce nightmarish visions and a medical psychosis. Ayahuasca use is usually accompanied by ceremonial dancing, sometimes with no loss of consciousness or impairment of movement. Shamans report the end of ayahuasca intoxication as marked by deep sleep and dreams.

Figure 5.7 An ayahuasca brew being prepared in Ecuador; this will be used as part of a shamanic ceremony.

Source: Wikimedia

Ceremonial usage varies. Shamans in eastern Peru and Ecuador consume ayahuasca before diagnosing and treating patients (Figure 5.7). In Colombia and

Brazil, ceremonies involving ayahuasca use are embedded in tribal lore. Tukanoans in Colombia use ayahuasca in the Yurupari ceremony, a rite of passage for adolescent boys who will become men. Ayahuasca intoxication helps the boys cope with the painful ordeal that underlies the ceremony and helps them see the tribal gods and the creation of the universe. "This experience convinces the Indians of the reality of their religious beliefs, because they have 'seen' everything that underlies them. To them, everyday life is unreal, and what caapi [Ayahuasca] brings them is the true reality."[13]

Under the Controlled Substances Act, a U.S. federal law, peyote, marijuana, psilocybin, and other psychotropic plants are classified as Schedule 1 drugs considered to have no medical use and the potential to be abused. Yet the problems associated with recreational drug use, such as addiction, are generally not seen when the usage is in a religious context—and hallucinogens are not necessarily addictive.

Religious drug use takes place only at certain times and in certain contexts, with defined beginning and end points. The ritual *setting* channels the experience in important ways. Since hallucinogens are considered to be "drugs" in the United States and many other countries, when discussing drug-induced altered states, it is important to recognize the difference between secular drug use, which is often extremely maladaptive and leads to many personal and social problems, and ritual drug use, which is highly controlled and generally adaptive.

The importance of this structure and the possible dangers of drug use are often recognized in the emic perspective as well. For example, Huichols, from the area of modern-day Mexico, emphasize the role of the shaman not just to lead them on the peyote pilgrimage but also to lead them back. Members of the Native American Church, who use peyote as a sacrament, also caution against using peyote in anything but a religious context. A Native youth once recounted how he was scolded by his deceased grandparents in a nightmarish vision when using peyote for kicks.

Hallucinogenic snuff among the Yanomamös

As seen previously, the use of hallucinogens is ubiquitous in South American traditional societies. Among the Yanomamös, the most commonly used hallucinogenic snuff is called *ebene*. It is made from the inner bark of several species of the genus *Virola*, a medium-sized jungle tree with dark green leaves and clusters of pungent yellow flowers. The blood-red resin from the tree bark contains the active ingredients producing hallucinations. Scraped from the trunk, the bark is moistened, mixed with wood ashes, and kneaded into a wad. After kneading, it is ground to a fine powder on a heated piece of broken pottery. The final product, *ebene*, a fine green powder, is manufactured and used on a daily basis by the shamans of the village. One man will insert a long, hollow tube into the nostril of another. Placing a bit of powder in one end, he blows the powder with a powerful puff of air into the nasal cavity of his partner. The effects of the drug can be immediately seen. The individual taking the drug chokes and coughs, his eyes water, and long strands of green mucus drip from the nostrils. He has difficulty walking and begins to experience visual hallucinations, mainly blubs of light.[14]

Yanomamös interpret these visual hallucinations as tiny, humanlike spirits called *hekura*. A shaman's supernatural power depends on his ability to entice the *hekura* into his

chest, which is believed to be a world of rivers, mountains, and forests where *hekura* can be stored as power. Under the influence of *ebene* they report seeing *hekura* spirits moving down from the mountains. Having decorated their bodies to make them attractive to the spirits, the men sing songs to entice the spirits into their chests. Once the *hekura* has settled in, the spirits will work with the shaman in bringing about healing as well as causing illness and death to his village's enemies.

Tobacco in South America

Many ethnographies of South American cultures describe the various ways in which drugs are used. In these societies, a drug is often used in combination with a variety of substances, both collected and cultivated.[15] Common among these is *tobacco*, which is used in several different forms and with many different delivery systems. The challenge is how to get the drug into the bloodstream, where it will move rapidly to the brain and produce bodily effects.

Substances are efficiently absorbed in parts of the body that are lined with epithelial tissue that contains a high density of blood capillaries. These include the lining of the lungs, mouth, throat, digestive system, rectum, nose, and eyes. Tobacco can be smoked, sucked (as in chewing tobacco), or drunk. Some tribes produce a processed form of tobacco with the consistency of a jelly, which is then rubbed on the teeth and gums. Tobacco can also be dried, ground into a powder, and blown up the nose.

Drugs also can be introduced into the rectum by some type of enema device. The advantages of this technique are that it will not irritate the stomach, and the drug will not be lost if the individual vomits. Sometimes, the enema device is a simple tube. The drug is then blown into the rectum. Another device uses a bulb that can be made from rubber or the bladder of an animal. A painting on a pottery vessel found in a Maya site solved the mystery of a particular type of pottery vessel that appeared to have no obvious function. The painting shows it being used, with a rubber bulb, as an enema syringe.

Marijuana among the Rastafarians

Rastafarians are members of an Afro-Caribbean religion that has its roots in Christianity but venerates the former emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, as Messiah. Rastafarians believe that people of African descent are Israelites reincarnated and generally focus on issues of race and **Afrocentrism**, a worldview centered on those of African descent. One of their key beliefs is in the coming repatriation of Blacks in the Americas to Africa. The Rastafarians are an example of a revitalization movement (see Chapter 12), originating in conditions of social and economic deprivation and meant to improve the lives of its adherents by adopting new religious beliefs. Since its beginnings, the Rastafarian movement has grown to encompass not just the poor but also the middle classes and has spread out from its place of origin, Jamaica, partly through the international spread of both Jamaican people and reggae music (Figure 5.8).

Rastafarians stress a philosophy of *ital levity*, which stresses the rejection of Western consumerism and emphasizes living in harmony with nature. This includes eating food

Figure 5.8 A Rastafarian man; dreadlocks are part of Rastafarian beliefs, based on the Biblical story of Samson and the transmission of strength through hair.

Source: Wikimedia

grown without chemical fertilizers and using herbal remedies. In addition to vegetarianism and not cutting hair (resulting in *dreadlocks*), a common Rastafarian religious practice is the smoking of marijuana or *ganga*. *Ganga* is sometimes referred to as the "wisdom weed" or "the holy herb" and is seen as a religious sacrament and a way to gain new understandings of self, the universe, and God.

Rastafarians trace the use of *ganga* to several passages in the Bible, including the following: "thou shalt eat the herb of the field" (Genesis 3:18), "eat every herb of the land" (Exodus 10:12), and "Better is a dinner of herb where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" (Proverbs 15:17).

Non-Indigenous uses of hallucinogens

Historically, Western medical and pharmaceutical industries have sought remedies from among Indigenous medical and religious approaches. The best known is the chemical agent *salicin* found in willow bark that various Native American tribes chewed to reduce fever and pain. In 1897, salicylic acid, the chemical basis for aspirin, was derived from this ancient Indigenous remedy.[16] Increasingly today, Indigenous religious hallucinogens have also made their way into the Western spiritual and therapeutic toolkit (see Chapter 11 for more on religion and healing).

Two of the better-known hallucinogens, marijuana (*Cannabis* sp.) and psilocybin (*Psilocybe* sp., also known as "magic mushrooms" or "shrooms"), have long been used by diverse cultural groups. Marijuana shows up in the historical record as early as 2800 BCE in China as a medicine used for pain, depression, and arthritis. Mushroom consumption is depicted in prehistoric rock art in Northern Australia as early as 10,000 BCE[17] and was also used by Aztecs as part of divination rituals and for medicinal therapy.[18] Recently, both of these plants have become increasingly normalized as part of Western pharmacology and socio-recreational use.

As the legal status of marijuana changes throughout the U.S. (and worldwide), there are increasing applications of this hallucinogen, not just for medicinal and recreational reasons but also for meditation and spiritual use. In 2017, the International Church of Cannabis was launched in Denver, Colorado, as a new religious movement where members, called Elevationists, seek to obtain greater self-awareness through ritual use of marijuana.[19] As marijuana is more widely used across Western societies, some of its spiritual applications

actually connect more to the ways it was originally used in early Indigenous societies and less as a drug purely for recreational use. This is also occurring with other hallucinogens, such as psilocybin and ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis* sp. and *Psychotria* sp.).

Referred to as *microdosing*, there is a growing popularity of using certain hallucinogens in small doses in order to provoke temporary, altered states of consciousness, allowing individuals to increase creativity, focus, and "spiritual awakening" as a personal experience.[20] The use of these substances among non-Indigenous populations as a vehicle for personal transformation has also led to issues of **cultural appropriation** and commoditization of religious practices, specifically associated with a huge rise in *ayahuasca tourism* in Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, and neighboring countries. As tour agencies develop to coordinate travelers (primarily from North America and Europe) with shamanic practitioners in South America willing to "host and dose," there are increasing concerns about the disruption of an Indigenous religious practice by spiritual tourists.[21] Hallucinogens used as part of a religious tradition have cultural meaning and importance beyond the individual level and serve to strengthen the identity of the community as a whole.

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, we listed the six dimensions of religion as set forth by Ninian Smart. One of these was the *experiential dimension*, an encounter with a sacred reality beyond ordinary experience. Religious experiences can be highly emotional. They can range from a generalized feeling of well-being to dramatic visions. These mental states—states that differ from one's normal state of awareness—are altered states of consciousness. They define religious experience. It is through such altered states that supernatural phenomena and powers manifest themselves, and abstract beliefs move into the realm of lived experience.

Interpreting the changes in mental state when one is in an altered state of consciousness is largely influenced by culture. In other words, culture provides a framework of meaning and an interpretive lens for our experiences.

The religious interpretations of altered states of consciousness generally fall into two categories. First, supernatural power, usually in the form of spirits or gods, enters the person's body, a phenomenon that we call **spirit possession**. An individual can control the spirit within his or her body to accomplish certain goals, or the spirit that possesses a human body can use that body to heal or to divine the unknown, often without the knowledge or the memory of the possessed person. However, possession by an unwanted spirit can also bring about illness that requires exorcism rituals.

The second common religious interpretation of an altered state of consciousness is that a person has entered a *trance state* because the soul has left the person's body. The experience of the individual in the altered state is then associated with the experiences of the soul, which is operating in a supernatural realm.

Altered states frequently play an important role in treatment for the healer and the patient. Healing is facilitated, and in some cases even accomplished, through suggestibility, emotional catharsis, and feelings of rejuvenation. For example, when possessed by a spirit, the healer may use the supernatural power of the spirit to remove the cause of the illness, often by sucking the offending spirit out of the patient's body. When an illness is

diagnosed as the loss of the soul, the healer sends their soul on a voyage to retrieve the lost soul of the patient (healing and religion are discussed in Chapter 11).

The most common idea of religious altered states, though, is the idea of achieving a *unitary state*, a state in which the individual experiences a feeling of becoming one with the supernatural, however this is conceived of by the community. For some, this is becoming one with God or a spirit; for others, it may be expressed as becoming one with a generalized supernatural force. We saw an example of this in our discussion of the Sabarimala pilgrimage, the goal of which is a unitary state with the god Lord Ayyappan.

The idea of the unitary state is often one of the major components of a religious ritual or even an entire religious system. A common religious theme is that humans were once at one with the supernatural but somehow became separated. The goal of many religious practices is to regain that unity. This theme can be seen in many familiar religions: for Christians, Jesus provides the pathway back to God; for Buddhists, following the teachings of Buddha allows an individual to attain oneness with the universe; for Muslims, reconciliation is possible through submission of the will to Allah.

In previous chapters, we discussed symbols, narratives, and the importance of religious rituals. However, it is only with a discussion of altered states of consciousness that a true appreciation of the power of rituals can be reached. Narratives provide a basis for belief, but it is only with ritual that these ideas are turned into experiences.

A religious altered state, for the believer, offers visceral proof of the existence of the supernatural. These experiences move the supernatural from the realm of abstract belief into that of a lived reality.

Summary

An *altered state of consciousness* is any mental state that differs from a normal mental state. Such states are characterized by a number of psychological experiences, such as alterations in patterns of thinking, disturbed sense of time, changes in emotional expression, distortion in body image, and others. A person can enter an altered state through a number of situations, including reduction of external stimulation, increase of external stimulation, increased alertness or decreased alertness, pain, or alterations in body chemistry, such as those that accompany fasting and sleep deprivation. These factors create observable changes in the activity of the brain.

Altered states of consciousness can also be brought about by the use of *hallucinogens* within a religious context. The experience is strongly influenced by cultural expectations. Examples of altered states of consciousness are found throughout human history and across cultures. Today, there are increasing opportunities for individuals to become "spiritual tourists," resulting in the potential disruption of Indigenous communities where their substances have an ancient history.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 5.

Study questions

1. What are the various sensations and characteristics that might be experienced in an altered state of consciousness?
2. Altered states of consciousness include familiar experiences such as dreaming and daydreaming. Describe any such experiences that you have had. How do they fit the description of an altered state of consciousness in this chapter?
3. How do non-chemical triggers like pain, fasting, and fatigue contribute to altered states of consciousness? How might these experiences be different than those induced by psychotropics?
4. Attend a religious service and pay close attention to any experiences that could be labeled as an altered state of consciousness. Describe the experience. What were the conditions that led to the experience? How do the physical layout of the church, temple, or mosque, the presence of ritual objects, and the playing of music help to produce an altered state of consciousness?
5. What is the role of an altered state of consciousness in the religious experience? Why are they important across cultures?
6. How are altered states of consciousness used in shamanic cultures?

Notes

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2 Ibid., p. 10.
3 D. Valentine, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Reproduced with permission of University of California Press in the format Republish in a book via Copyright Clearance Center.
4 O. Sacks, *Migraine* (New York: Random House, 1992).
5 The various symbols other than letters used in San words stand for a variety of clicks that characterize their languages. These are called *diacritics*.
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7 W. LaBarre, *Culture in Context: Selected Writings of Weston LaBarre* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), pp. 79–82.
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16 Today, salicylic acid has been re-configured chemically as acetylsalicylic acid, a compound that no longer tastes as bitter as the original plant chemical.

17 See www.mushroomrevival.com/blogs/blog/the-history-of-psilocybin-magic-mushroom-use-through-the-ages
18 For earlier uses of Psilocybe, see www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PREVENTIONWELLNESS/Documents/ELSI%20Report%20Draft-%20Historical%20and%20Indigenous%20Use.pdf. For early uses of Cannabis, see www.sydney.edu.au/lambert/medicinal-cannabis/history-of-cannabis.html#:~:text=
19 See www.westword.com/marijuana/inside-international-church-cannabis-denver-elevationism-tourist-attraction-11852997
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Chapter 6

Religious specialists

In small-scale societies with relatively simple technologies, rituals are performed by most or all of the adult members of the community. However, some individuals may develop a special interest in religious practices and develop an ability to contact the supernatural. An example is the healers found among !Kung Sans, in which around half of the men and a number of women become healers while remaining full participants in the secular life of the group. Full-time, specialized religious statuses usually do not exist in such societies because these societies do not produce the food surplus necessary to support full-time specialists.

As discussed earlier, religious activities are not clearly delineated from non-religious activities in small-scale societies. Religious activities are interwoven with secular activities, and, sometimes, the separation between religious and secular is not even recognized. While these societies lack full-time religious specialists, some societies have developed part-time specialists. These are people who earn their living at an economic task, such as hunting or farming, but who are called on to perform rituals when necessary because of their special knowledge or abilities. Such a person might be paid for their services, but many are not.

In larger and more technologically complex societies, we see the development of many occupational specializations, including religious specialists. These practitioners may be full-time specialists who derive their income primarily from the performance of religious rituals either through voluntary community support or through payment for services by individuals whom they have helped. For example, religious practitioners may be found in a marketplace, ready to be approached by clients who need their services in order to secure economic success for some endeavor or perhaps a cure for an illness. In some societies, religious practitioners attain important political and economic positions.

There are many terms used to describe religious specialists. Unfortunately, the terms are not used in a consistent manner—sometimes, it is a problem of translation because the nature of religious practitioners and their activities in many societies (emic perspectives) might not neatly fit a defined category in our society or as defined by anthropologists (etic perspectives).

Two terms frequently used to categorize religious specialists are *shaman* and *priest*. These are not mutually exclusive categories but rather ends of a continuum. Very often, a religious practitioner that we might classify as a priest will perform some functions that are more characteristic of a shaman; the reverse is also true.

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Shamans

The distinction between priests and **shamans** is not always clear-cut, and there are many religious specialists who fall somewhere in between. Generally speaking, in contrast to a priest, a shaman receives his or her power directly from the spirit world. He or she acquires status and abilities, such as healing, through personal communication with the supernatural during shamanic trances or altered states of consciousness. The route to becoming a religious specialist and how each functions within a society will also differ for shamans and priests.

Defining shamanism

Like many terms used in the study of religion, the term *shaman* has been used in different ways. Some use the term very broadly to encompass a wide variety of phenomena; others use it in a very narrow sense. Most agree that shamanism refers to techniques used by specific kinds of religious specialists and that shamans can be found in a wide variety of cultures and religions (Figure 6.1).

The term *shaman* actually comes from the Tungus language of Central Siberia. It refers to religious specialists who use handheld drums and spirit helpers to aid the members of their

Figure 6.1 Shaman. A shaman performs at the Kaijiang Festival in Harbin, China, at the start of the fishing season.

Source: Retained

community by healing the sick, divining the future, and ensuring success in the hunt. The term was later expanded to include similar religious specialists in other cultures, although there are various works and titles that are used as synonyms for shaman. In Native North America, these practitioners are often referred to as medicine men/women or "Indian doctors." In other cultures, they may be known as healers, curers, preachers, or even "witchdoctors."

For those who apply the term more broadly, the crucial elements of shamanism include direct contact and communication with the supernatural through trance, the use of spirit helpers, the act of journeying or spiritual travel, the use of a specific culturally recognized and transmitted method and paraphernalia, and a socially recognized special position for the shaman.

Unlike priests, who are full-time community-based specialists, shamans are usually part-time independent contractors. The authority of a shaman lies in his or her charisma and ability to heal using secular and sacred techniques. The relationship between a shaman and the community is a personal one. Shamans focus on specific problems, such as those that affect a particular individual or family. Because clients often select a shaman in a particular situation for the shaman's reputation and track record in curing, successful shamans can amass a significant degree of social authority.

Becoming a shaman

Shamans often see themselves as being *called* by spirits to serve as a shaman, and they receive their power and authority directly from supernatural beings. In some societies, a person may deliberately seek a call by inducing an altered state of consciousness. This is most frequent in societies where shamans achieve some degree of social authority. In other societies, the task of being a shaman is so difficult and demanding that individuals do not seek a call. When a call comes—through a dream, a trance, or recovery from an illness—the individual may be reluctant to act on it.

Oftentimes, shamans run in family lines, and members are called, or elected, by the spirit world. Aurora Saqui, a Maya woman from Belize interviewed by anthropologist Ben Kracht in December 2006, related how her uncle, Don Elijio Panti, a *H'men* (shaman, the "h" is not pronounced), was over 100 years old when he died. Although Aurora did not want to become an H'men and ignored some of the signs from the spirit world, such as finding *sastun*, or crystals, lying on the ground while walking along paths, she had a dream early one morning. In her dream, Don Elijio told her it was her turn to take his place. When she awoke a couple of hours later, she learned that her uncle had passed away about the time she had dreamt about him. Afterward, she became an *H'men* (Figure 6.2).

The spirits will commonly call to the future shaman during a particularly difficult time in their lives, including periods of stress, illness, accident, possession, or near-death experiences. Shamans are sometimes referred to as "wounded healers." At times, a shaman may be called through their own illnesses, including through incidents of psychosis or possession. The shamanic initiation often includes the idea that the spirits eat, dismember, or kill the person before that person can be reborn as a shaman. The spirits are testing the initiate, and the symbolism of death, transformation, and rebirth are very common in this transformation.

Shamans often become seriously ill as a part of their divine call, oftentimes falling into comas. Importantly, they learn how to heal other people because they recover from their

Figure 6.2 *H'men* store in Belize; herbs are a common part of the shamanic toolkit.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

own illnesses. Ben Kracht interviewed a Kiowa shaman in October 1989 and learned about his personal and family background. His speech was thick and hard to understand because, as a child, he suffered from severe cerebral palsy, which left him with a speech impediment. His uncle, who was a shaman, gave him his *doctoring kit*, a cedar box with bird feathers and other regalia associated with his practice. He did so because he felt that his nephew's physical condition was a gift that allows him to have compassion for his patients.

The shaman often undergoes a period of training, usually with an older shaman. Although learning religious knowledge is important—shamanic techniques, genealogy, and information about the spirit world—the main purpose of the training is to learn how to contact the supernatural through dreams, trances, and visions—a very dangerous activity—and how to manipulate the supernatural world in order to achieve some specified end. The candidate establishes a relationship with a spirit familiar who acts as his guide to the supernatural world. The period of apprenticeship may include periods of seclusion, fasting, and the taking of hallucinogens, but the main goal is to learn to enter into and control the experience of an altered state of consciousness.

The shamanic role and rituals

The shaman may contact the supernatural by traditional, standardized methods that fit our definition of ritual. The ritual is only a means for contacting and establishing a relationship with a supernatural entity; it is not an end in itself.

The identification and control of spirit helpers and the ability to enter altered states of consciousness (referred to as *shamanic journeying*) are central to the role of the shaman. These spirits help the shaman fight other hostile spirits and help the shaman diagnose and treat illnesses. In some cultures, illness results from the loss of the patient's soul. In such occurrences, the shaman enters an altered state of consciousness and sends his or her soul to recapture the patient's soul and bring it back to the patient's body.

The shamanic ritual may be a simple affair, analogous to a private consultation between the patient and the shaman, or a major public ritual. In the latter, it is common for the ritual to be dramatic, aided by various theatrical and performative techniques on the part of the shaman. Drumming, singing, dancing, and elaborate costumes contribute to this effect, as do the use of ventriloquism and sleight of hand. Using these techniques does not necessarily

imply intent by the shaman to deceive onlookers. Shamans operate in the realm of the supernatural, which others are unable to perceive. Using sleight of hand is an attempt by the shaman to represent and convince others of what they see as true accomplishments on the invisible level. All shamans are magicians who know how to perform feats of magic using sleight of hand and other techniques to display their prowess publicly. Patients and observers want tangible evidence of a shaman's powers, conspicuous through his or her ability to perform magical feats (Figure 6.3).

The movement of the shaman between the realm of the natural and supernatural is often related to a worldview that sees humans living in Middleworld between Upperworld and Lowerworld. The three worlds are linked by a symbolic central vertical axis called an Axis Mundi, or Axis of the World. The shaman is able to travel between these worlds, usually along this central axis. In shamanic rituals, a ladder, pole, or tree is often used to represent the axis, like the pole-flying rituals practiced by Totonac-speaking peoples in Veracruz, Mexico. In this ritual, individuals climb the pole and re-enact the birth of the universe in its vertical form.[1]

The shaman's ability to make a soul journey to the supernatural realm (in any of the three Worlds) is linked to their special abilities at *transformation*. Often, a shaman will undergo a symbolic transformation into animal form, such as the jaguar or eagle, in order to "travel" swiftly. Sometimes this is called "shapeshifting" (or transmogrification). Also common is gender ambiguity or transformation, where the shaman wears the clothes of or even takes on some of the social roles of the opposite sex.

Because of their ability to contact and manipulate the supernatural directly, members of a shaman's own community often regard the shaman with some ambivalence. The same powers that enable them to cure sickness could also be used to cause it. Unlike shamans, priests lack this ability and are not viewed with the same concern. Although priests are capable of the same personal evil that we all are, they have no special abilities by virtue of their position.

Shamanic visualizations

In a 2008 study of shamanic journeys, psychologists Adam Rock and Stanley Krippner found that shamans' visualizations and experiences share certain attributes—shamans experience a learned cosmology (they know where they are); a cohesive geography that always involves travel and the perception of movement (they know where they are going); an encounter with phenomena that are known in their cultural cosmology (they know what they will encounter); and they travel with an intention (they know why they are there).[2] While practiced cross-culturally and sharing fundamental attributes, shamanism is also a cultural artifact—a critical means of human adaptation.

Figure 6.3 A shamanic ceremony in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. It is not unusual for shamanism to be practiced in conjunction with another religious tradition.

Source: Alamy

Siberian shamanism

Shamans of Central Siberia are religious specialists who use handheld drums and spirit helpers to help the members of their community. Siberian shamans perform rituals to heal the sick, divine the future, and ensure success in the hunt. Like most other shamans, Siberian shamans see the world as divided into three realms with various strata within the upper and lower realms. The Upper Realm is one of light and good spirits; the Middle Realm is the home of people and spirits of the earth; and the Lower Realm is one of darkness and evil spirits.[3] While in an altered state of consciousness, it is the shaman's role to communicate with various spirits by journeying within the other Realms.

One of the main functions of the shaman is healing. This can be accomplished in many ways. A shaman can communicate with spirits to learn what they want. They can also dispel a disease-causing spirit or retrieve a lost soul. A shaman has spirit familiars or animal soul guides, also called *power animals*, that assist in the shaman's work. These spirits give the shaman his particular qualities and powers. It is by having these spirits that the shaman is able to heal, but they also give the shaman the potential to do harm.

Other shamans specialize in contacting spirits to help ensure a successful hunt. In this case, the shaman contacts the spirits of an animal species and makes a deal with them. The animal spirits will supply humans with animal food, and the humans will eventually supply the spirits with human flesh and blood in exchange. This is one cause of human sickness and death. It is the role of the shaman to minimize the amount of human sickness while trying to maximize the number of animals that will be successfully hunted. Part of a shaman's success results from a pact with the animal spirits through a special relationship with the "daughter of the elk" or reindeer spirit, usually symbolized as the shaman's relationship to their drum (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4 Sami shaman's drum from Norway; the drum is a common element in northern European shamanism.

Source: Wikimedia

Yakut shamanism

Yakuts, or Sakhas, live in northeastern Siberia in small dispersed groups hunting, fishing, and herding horses and reindeer. Missionaries of the Russian Orthodox Church entered the region in the early eighteenth century, and while many Yakuts converted to Christianity, the practice of shamanism continued, and most people participated in both Orthodox and shamanic rituals. In 1931, the Soviet government began a program designed to destroy traditional religious practices by persecuting shamans. Many were executed or deported. Ethnic Russians moved

into the area and today outnumber the native population. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1992 and the creation of the Republic of Sakha, a part of the Russian Federation, the ban on shamanism was officially lifted. With this came a renewed sense of identity among the Yakuts; shamanic rituals increased in frequency, and traditional beliefs began being taught in the schools.

Like many traditional peoples living in a modern state and exposed to different religious practices, the Yakuts have faced cultural change. Christian elements have been incorporated into shamanic rituals and beliefs, resulting in a more syncretic religious system. For example, anthropologist Takako Yamada quotes a shaman in 1994:

> I didn't see many gods in the upper world. I only saw Jesus Christ, a woman god and one or two other gods. Jesus and the woman gave me a photo, asking me to look after the people in the world. So, I believe I have received a universal ability to cure not only the Yakut but also foreign people.[4]

Along with the revival of traditional shamanism have come new groups that often develop around a charismatic leader who combines shamanic and Christian elements and produces a new type of religious practice. Anthropologist Marjorie Mandelstam Balzar studied the ritual practice of one such leader, Kyta Baaly.[5] Although young and poorly educated, he has attracted a significant following. He identifies as a "white shaman" (*aiyy oiuun*) who is associated with benevolence and blessings, and he performs traditional Yakut rituals based on healing. Yet, Baaly also claims to be the son of Jesus Christ. Followers wear a small "sacred world path" pin or pendant that combines a Christian cross with a tree symbol. This is an example of a revivalistic movement, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 12.

Korean shamanism

Although shamanism is usually thought of as a feature of small-scale societies, shamans are also found in many industrial societies. For example, Korea has a long history of shamanism. At one time, shamans, who were mostly men, had considerable political influence. Over time, this influence waned, and eventually, shamans were persecuted and driven underground. Shamanism moved from being a prominent public institution to being a more private, secretive activity. Today, most Korean shamans are women. This provides many women with a good source of income and also gives them some degree of influence over the community. Shamanism is now becoming recognized as an important part of traditional Korean culture, and many aspects of shamanistic ritual, such as songs and dances, are also being publicly performed for entertainment.

In Korea, shamans are chosen by the spirits. Women who have experienced some type of psychological stress in their lives are especially vulnerable. In their search for someone to possess, society believes that the spirits tend toward individuals whose *maŭm*, or soul, has already been fractured and, therefore, been made more vulnerable. The sign that a particular woman has been selected is manifested as possession illness or *sinbyŏng*. There are many physical and psychological symptoms of *sinbyŏng*, but the most significant is an entrance into a trance state. The individual is ill with possession sickness until she accepts the call of the spirits. Many individuals chosen by the spirits are very reluctant to become

shamans, who are considered in Korean society to be social deviants. However, if she accepts the call she apprentices herself to an experienced shaman who eventually performs an initiation ritual that transforms her into a full-fledged shaman.

Anthropologist Youngsook Kim Harvey recounts the description by a Korean shaman of the events that led to her initiation:

> Long before I had any indication of supernatural notification, I found myself feeling excited by the rhythm of the *changgu* ("drum"). I don't remember how I came to be brought back to myself . . . it happened more and more often. When I heard the *changgu*, I seemed to forget everything instantly and lose all sense of inhibition. I wanted to dance and chant to it. It is this sense of being swept up and away in a weightless sort of way that makes you dance and be a *mudang* in spite of everything else. When you are in that state of mind, you cannot think of anything else . . . Even now, just talking about it to you makes the temperature rise in me . . . You can see how people who are possessed by spirits can go insane if they are improperly initiated . . . You have no way of making use of the feelings that take hold of you.
>
> When you start doing your own *kut*, you just feel your spirits stealing into you and taking over; the sensation is incomparable . . . You just know that you've got the spirits in you . . . that you don't have to worry because it's them inside you, not you . . . You're just a medium and you feel marvelous. Otherwise, how could anyone do the things a *mudang* does in her sober mind? You lose all sense of embarrassment . . . all inhibition . . . you are suffused with the feeling, "I'm the number one, the best—there is none else like me in the whole world!"[6]

Korean shamans are called to perform shamanic rituals for a number of reasons, including to guide the dead to the "otherworld." During this ritual, the shaman takes the role of the deceased, who is then able to communicate with the family. Shamanic rituals are also performed to cure illnesses, for divination, and to ensure the good fortune of the family and community.

Today, Korean shamanism is rapidly growing and expanding in urban areas. Some estimates are as high as 100,000 practicing shamans, approximately five times as many as were estimated in the 1950s.[7]

Pentecostal healers as shamans

The distinction between shamans and priests is not always clear, and in some Western religious traditions, practitioners usually thought of as being priests may exhibit many shamanistic traits. One example is Pentecostal faith healers (see Box 6.1 for another example), who make direct contact with and channel the Holy Spirit from themselves to another person during faith healing. Altered states of consciousness are achieved through rhythmic speech and music. Participants in the ritual are often moved to shout, dance, run up and down the aisle, or cry. The healing ritual, known as "laying on of hands," generally takes place during a formal service. The person in need of healing stands in front of the preacher, who is standing in front of the altar. Others stand behind the person receiving the prayer in case he or she needs physical support. The preacher anoints the person's head with oil and recites incantations. The preacher may also rub the head, torso, back, or legs of the person. The whole congregation may participate by clapping in unison during the healing. The Holy Spirit is believed to possess both the healer and the patient, which can lead either one of them to convulse suddenly or begin speaking in tongues.

Box 6.1 Clown doctors as shamans

Although Western medicine is undeniably effective in treating many diseases, it has been criticized for focusing only on the physical disease and neglecting the patient's illness experience (see Chapter 11). In an attempt to address this issue, many complementary therapies have been introduced. One example is the use of clowns in pediatric hospitals. A study by Linda Miller Van Blerkom of the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit (CCU), which entertains children in New York City hospitals, suggests that these clowns have many similarities with traditional shamanic healers.

The clowns dress in outlandish costumes that include a white doctor's coat and a doctor's bag filled with magic tricks and props. They are described as popping red foam-rubber clown noses out of respirator tubing, hiding puppet animals under their coats, blowing bubbles, singing lullabies to children, doing magic tricks, dancing, and telling jokes. They distract patients during painful procedures and also interact with families and staff.

Van Blerkom points out that both clowns and shamans mediate between order and chaos, sacred and profane, natural and supernatural, and that clowns with healing functions are known from other cultures, like the sacred clowns of the Hopis and Zunis. She notes several similarities between shamans and clown doctors. For example, both wear unusual costumes, and both are viewed with some ambivalence.

The use of puppets by clown doctors is reminiscent of shamanic spirit helpers, and both use music and sleight of hand. Traditional shamans and clowns use suggestion and manipulation of cultural symbols and pay more attention to the patient's experience and social context than Western doctors typically do. Van Blerkom writes:

> The clowns say they parody doctors and play with hospital equipment to lighten up the atmosphere and make children less afraid of doctors and their instruments, but one can also recognize another shamanistic function: psychosocial support. By involving the social group, illness and curing are given public recognition and the patient receives group support. Shamanistic rituals reinforce social roles and can be therapeutic for families struggling to cope with an illness and disorder.

Source: Linda Miller Van Blerkom, "Clown Doctors: Shaman Healers of Western Medicine," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 9 (1995), pp. 462–475.

Similar to shamans, many Pentecostal preachers also report having been called by the supernatural, in this case, God, and describe prophetic dreams and visions. Pentecostal preachers may also function similarly to shamans by using an altered state of consciousness to contact directly and experience the supernatural to heal another individual.

Neoshamanism

The last several decades have seen a growing interest in shamanism, primarily in the United States and Europe. Much of this can be traced to the publication of historian Mircea Eliade's book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* in 1951.[8] This book was one of the first to look at common elements of shamanism cross-culturally and to focus on shamanism as a technique for achieving an altered state of consciousness. The interest in shamanism, however, really took off starting in the 1970s. Many cultural themes in the United States helped contribute to this, including the legacy of the 1960s drug culture, an interest in non-Western religions, environmentalism, the New Age, self-help, and self-realization movements. Popular anthropology works also contributed largely through the work of Carlos Castañeda and Michael Harner.

While a graduate student at UCLA, Carlos Castañeda (1925–1998) claimed to be apprenticed to a Yaqui (Arizona) shaman named Don Juan Matus. Based on his experiences, he wrote a series of books beginning with *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, published in 1968.[9] The earliest books focused on the use of mind-altering drugs to experience another reality. Later, he moved his focus to a new technique of body movements, or magical passes, that he called *tensegrity*, a term borrowed from architect R. Buckminster Fuller, who coined the term as a combination of "tensional" and "integrity." The aim of tensegrity is to increase awareness of the energy fields that, according to Castañeda, humans are made of. This is done through body movements and breathing, which Castañeda said were taught to him by Don Juan and go back to ancient Mexico.

Castañeda's work has been criticized by many academics as fictional, not true ethnography. At best, the accounts are compiled from various beliefs and ideas surrounding shamanic cultures. To date, no one has been able to verify the existence of Don Juan, and experts in Yaqui culture have cast doubts on the accuracy of his accounts, among other issues. Although Castañeda passed away in the late 1990s, workshops in tensegrity continue to be offered, and his books remain popular.

Michael Harner (1929–2018) was a cultural anthropologist who spent many years studying shamanism, primarily in the Americas among the Jívaro and Shipibo Conibo cultures of the Upper Amazon. Through extensive ethnographic study, Harner found certain recurring shamanic concepts and practices across cultures. Together, these common features of shamanism form a specific *methodology* called **core shamanism** that Harner felt could be taught and practiced usefully outside of their original culture-specific contexts. In 1980, Harner published *The Way of the Shaman* as an introduction for those in the West interested in pursuing shamanism[10] and established The Foundation for Shamanic Studies (FSS) that offers training workshops in core shamanism:

> Since the West overwhelmingly lost its shamanic knowledge centuries ago due to religious oppression, the Foundation's programs in core shamanism are particularly intended for Westerners to reacquire access to their rightful spiritual heritage through quality workshops and training courses. Training in core shamanism includes teaching students to alter their consciousness through classic shamanic non-drug techniques such as sonic driving, especially in the form of repetitive drumming, so that they can discover their own hidden spiritual resources, transform their lives, and learn how to help others.[11]

Although the Foundation focuses on teaching core shamanism, it also has a mission to study, preserve, and revive Indigenous shamanism within cultures that seek assistance to maintain their heritage. The Indigenous shaman database at the Foundation, called the Shamanic Knowledge Conservatory, is a significant resource for scholars studying shamanism.

Although Harner's original work with the Jívaros centered on the use of the hallucinogen ayahuasca, core shamanism focuses on drumming to achieve altered states of consciousness. In a typical workshop, the participants are told to lie down and relax with their eyes closed or covered. A leader then directs them through an exercise in guided imagery. The participants are told to begin their journey by entering the earth at a place well known to them in the physical world, such as a lake, a cave, or even the root system of a tree (for the Lowerworld) or a staircase, rooftop, or cloud (for the Upperworld). They then travel to the other realms where they meet and interact with spirit teachers and power animals, seeking to learn something useful, seek something lost, or carry out healing.

Those who use techniques like these proposed by Castañeda and Harner are known as *neoshamans* to distinguish them from traditional Indigenous shamans. There are significant differences between the two. **Neoshamanism** is focused on an individual, often as a self-help means of improving one's life, while traditional shamanism is focused on helping the community. Neoshamans choose to participate and focus on what they consider to be the positive aspects of shamanism (healing and encouragement), while Indigenous shamanism often includes a "darker" side where spirits can be harnessed for social harm against anyone or anything threatening an individual or community. The Indigenous shamanic trance is often described as a terrifying experience, and Indigenous shamans may be marginalized and feared because of their ability to do great evil. A neoshamanic trance is usually accomplished through drumming, singing, dancing, or breathing exercises and meditation.

Neoshamanism has also been criticized for presenting shamanic beliefs and practices out of their cultural context through such concepts as core shamanism. A single practitioner may choose bits and pieces from many different cultures. Harsher criticisms accuse neoshamanism of cultural imperialism, neocolonial attitudes, and perpetuating racist stereotypes of indigenous people. Harner and others are seen as profiting from the commodification of Indigenous identity, beliefs, and practices. Although some Indigenous healers do encourage neoshamanism and are willing to teach non-Indigenous individuals, this is a very contentious issue, one that speaks to the larger issue of who controls cultural symbols and rituals. Despite these challenges, however, shamanism is a growing practice worldwide. In the 2021 census of England/Wales, on the question of religion, 8,000 individuals identified themselves as practitioners of shamanism, a tenfold increase since 2011, when only 650 individuals identified themselves as such.[12]

Priests

Priests are full-time religious specialists associated with formal religious institutions that may be linked with kinship groups, communities, or larger political units and are given religious authority by those units. Priesthoods tend to be found in more complex food-producing societies, whereas shamanism tends to be associated with technologically simpler ones or smaller

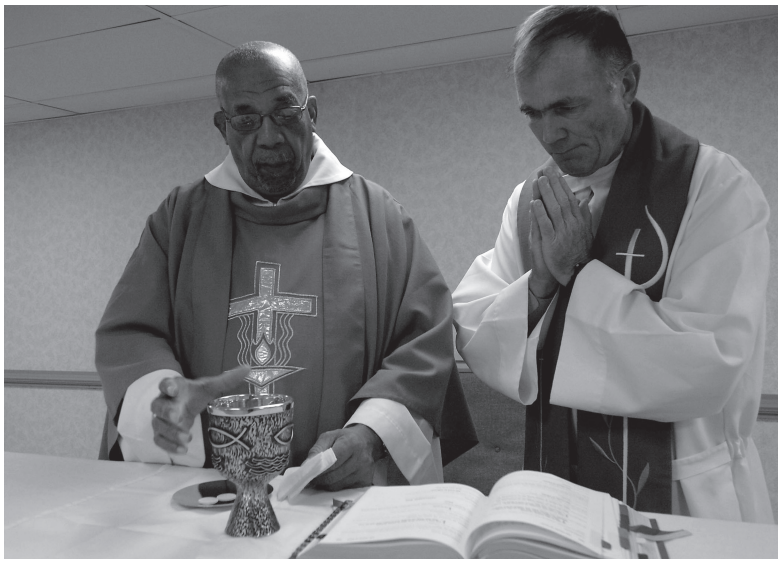

Figure 6.5 Roman Catholic priests celebrating Mass; priests are members of a larger organization or religious institution.

Source: Wikimedia

subgroups. The term *priest* is a generic term not associated with a single religion, and it includes a wide variety of practitioners, including ministers and rabbis.

A priest acts as a representative of the community in dealing with the deity or deities. In this capacity, priests are responsible for the performance of prescribed rituals (Figure 6.5). These include periodic rituals on a ceremonial calendar that are usually tied to the agricultural cycle, rites of passage such as birth and death rituals and weddings, and situational rituals in the event of disaster and illness. A priest's skill is based on learning ritual knowledge, sacred narratives, and the ability to perform these rituals for the benefit of the community. However, a particular ritual might or might not result in the desired end—a ritual performed for a rain god to end a drought might result in a rainstorm or a continuing drought. However, the failure of the ritual to work is not necessarily interpreted as due to the activities of the priest; it might be due to the will of the deity who has made the decision whether or not to let the rains come.

Although priests may contend with important, practical matters, such as the success of crops or the curing of illnesses, they are also associated with rituals that have more generalized purposes. These purposes are usually articulated in social rites of intensification and deal with the reinforcement of the belief system and the established ethical code. Priestly rituals legitimize a wide range of community ventures—for example, the coronation of the British monarch by the Archbishop of Canterbury—and, on a more personal level, establish the legitimacy of a child as a member of the community through birth rituals.

Priests also are meant to personify the image of the ideal person. They are expected to be models of ethics and morality in their communities, and they are held to higher standards of behavior than the population at large. When a priest fails to live up to these standards, the significance is much greater than when another person fails in the same way.

Priestly rituals usually take place in a space that is set aside for ceremonial activities, a place considered to be sacred space. It may be a community space as well, such as an outdoor area or a structure, and the structure may be large enough that the entire community can enter and participate in the rituals. However, in many societies, the ceremonial structure—a shrine or a temple—is where sacred objects are kept and into which *only* a priest may enter.

Individuals become priests for a variety of reasons. Often, it is an inherited responsibility, as when a priestly office is passed on from father to son. Many societies have priestly lineages, such as the Levites of the Old Testament, or priestly classes or castes, such as

the Brahmins of Hinduism. Sometimes, the position of priest is one of great prestige and power, and one enters the priesthood to further one's standing in the community. At the conclusion of training, the priest is formally recognized as a religious authority by the community through a rite of passage, such as an ordination.

Priests also may receive a call to their religious role, sometimes through dreams, visions, or trances. In some societies, a person becomes a priest after being cured of an illness; being cured may be taken as a sign of divine favor. In other societies, the reason for entering the priesthood might be more practical. In the Europe of centuries past, one of the only ways a middle-class man could get an education was by joining the priesthood. Research and teaching would be important components of his responsibilities as a priest. It was also the custom in some agricultural societies that the oldest son inherited the land, the middle son entered the military, and the youngest son entered the priesthood.

The training of a priest usually involves memorization of vast amounts of knowledge that is held within the religious institution itself. In complex, food-producing societies, the very survival of the community might depend on the priest's competence in the performance of traditional rituals. Although a priest may connect with the supernatural through visions and trances, this ability is not as important as the priest's ability to memorize and perform rituals in the proper manner. For example, ancient Maya priests could predict lunar eclipses, understood the sidereal revolution of Venus around the sun (225 days) and the synodic cycles of Venus (584 days), and could predict when it would appear as Morning Star and Evening Star, as depicted in the *Dresden Codex*, one of the Maya divinatory books that survived the Spanish Inquisition. They also knew that the Pleiades rose in the west in May/June, bringing the summer rains and the planting season. Maya priests predicted astronomical events to control power.

Zuni priests

Zunis, a pueblo people of the American Southwest culture area, have religious practices that involve a complex hierarchy of priests, which forms the basis of Zuni religious and political organization.

According to anthropologist Ruth Bunzel, there are six esoteric **cults** in Zuni Pueblo with limited memberships. Each is connected to a special priesthood, participating as masked dancers in two six-month cycles marked by the summer and winter solstices. Summer rituals pertain to abundant rainfall and harvests, whereas winter rituals relate to war, medicine, and fertility. Rituals occur throughout the year, beginning with the Shalako Ceremony, which is held before December 21, the Zuni New Year.[13]

1. The Cult of the Sun is associated with Sun Father, who is offered sacred cornmeal offerings at sunrise. The *Pekwin* priest, the holiest man in Zuni, derives his power from Sun Father. He installs priests and officiates over ceremonies in which the priests of other cults participate.
2. Cult of the Rainmakers—the spirits who inhabit all waters—consists of twelve priesthoods, each represented by two to six members based on clan affiliation. Rain priests are expected to be peaceful men unconcerned with affairs of the outside world. They do not perform public ceremonies but hold secret rituals during the rainy season between late July and September to bring the much-needed rain.

3. All Zuni males belong to the Cult of the Katsinam (Katsinas), which is divided into six divisions connected to the six kivas—rectangular, above-ground ceremonial chambers—and directions/colors: Wall (north/yellow); Manure House (west/blue); Corn House (south/red); Brains House (east/white); Few People (zenith/all colors); and Back Wall House (nadir/black). *Komosona*, the Katsina chief, his assistant, and two Bow Priests oversee the masked dances that take place each year. Each kiva group dances three times a year.
4. Associated with the Katsinam Society, the Cult of the Katsina Priests inhabit the spirit Katsina Village, *Kolhu/wala:wa*, though they are connected with fecundity, not rain. Each priest has a distinctive personality and a mask inherited from the previous generation in the family line. *Pauitwa*, the chief of *Kolhu/wala:wa*, represents the three Zuni virtues—dignity, beauty, and kindliness.
5. Two Bow Priests, a society chief and a battle chief, lead the Cult of the War Gods, which deals with outside threats. In Indigenous times, men who killed and scalped an enemy were compelled to join the Cult of the War Gods and perform the Scalp Dance to protect themselves from the enemy's ghost. Bow Priests are war leaders, protectors of the village, and persecutors of witches.
6. The Cult of the Beast Gods consists of the prey animals—and the patrons for twelve medicine societies whose members are general practitioners, though each society heals as a group and has a specialty—treating bullet wounds, epilepsy, or sore throats. Once healed by a society, one is compelled to become a member. For instance, a person healed by the Galaxy Society is initiated into the society as a lifelong member (women also belong to medicine societies). Over time, society members learn to perform esoteric feats, such as walking over hot coals or stick swallowing. Fetishes, special altars, and ritual paraphernalia represent each medicine society, which performs secret rituals that distinguish it from other societies. Public rituals are conducted during the fall and winter.

Okinawan priestesses

Okinawa, located southwest of the main islands of Japan, was once the independent kingdom of Ryukyus. Although the language, culture, and religious beliefs are very similar to those of other areas in Japan, there are considerable differences as well. Okinawa's Indigenous religion is based on animism and shamanism but has been heavily influenced by Shinto, Buddhism, and Taoism entering from Japan and China. Like Shinto, Okinawan religion sees the world as inhabited by a myriad of supernatural beings referred to as *kami*. By placating and pleasing the *kami* through rituals, misfortune can be avoided, and blessings gained.

There are a variety of religious specialists, all of whom are women (Figure 6.6). Okinawa is the only known society in which women lead a mainstream, official, publicly-funded religion practiced by both sexes. The two main specialists are priestesses, *kaminchu*, and shaman-like practitioners called *yuta*. The *yuta* mediate between the villagers and the supernatural by communicating with the ancestors and the *kami*. They practice divination as well as healing rituals. Whereas each *yuta* has one or more *kami* she communicates with regularly, the *kaminchu* is believed to actually embody a particular *kami* associated with the clan.

Figure 6.6 Okinawan Priestesses. Priestesses perform during a ceremony at Shuri Castle Festival, Okinawa.

Source: Wikimedia

Kaminchu rituals are funded by the village council or clan and take place at the village prayer house in the main square, clan houses, or sacred groves. On these occasions, the priestesses wear elaborate five-piece white outfits and crowns of leaves. This is the conventional clothing for the *kami* as well. The significance of the *kaminchu* is simply their presence; they actually do very little in a ritual. They sit in designated places on specific days and receive food offerings from the villagers. They do not preach, perform rites of passage, or heal—they sit and eat. However, like the *kami* themselves, they are believed to emit good spiritual energy. The villagers also like to have the *kaminchu* around at events such as housewarmings and agricultural festivals.

The role of *kaminchu* is semi hereditary. Each clan has a certain number of *kaminchu* positions that can only be filled by female members of the clan. Within some clans, certain positions can only be filled by women of certain families. The role of chief *kaminchu* for a village is traditionally passed from mother to daughter.

Susan Sered compared the stories told by *kaminchu* (priestesses) and *yuta* (shamans) of how they attained their positions.[14] Both types of religious practitioners told of illnesses, but Sered found significant differences between the two. The *kaminchu* reported minor illnesses that generally involved some sort of bleeding or other bodily rupture. The Okinawan

worldview is that the body is whole and sealed, and this illness event was seen as opening the path for the embodiment of the *kami*. However, the illness is symbolic. It does not make the woman into a *kaminchu* but is considered a sign or reminder of what she was born to be.

In contrast, the illnesses reported by the *yuta* involved serious psychological, physical, or social dysfunction. After a long illness that made them social outcasts, they were able to heal themselves both physically and socially through becoming *yuta*. Overcoming the illness was seen as proof that the *yuta* would be effective in her role and would have the ability to understand the suffering of others. The status of *yuta* is more ambiguous, and the question being answered in the stories they told was why a person would take on such a role.

Eastern Orthodox priests

Religious organizations associated with nation-states or multistate organizations are characterized by many types of priests organized in complex hierarchical organizations, such as those of the Roman Catholic Church. In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches consist of a series of independent religious organizations. Some are associated with particular nations, such as the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, but others are not. Within the church are many religious specialists who fall within our definition of priest. These specialists are organized into a complex religious hierarchy headed by the Patriarch (Figure 6.7). The head of a region is the *bishop*. Each bishop is independent of other bishops, although bishops at several levels will form various councils. The specialists called priests are usually assigned to particular churches and are responsible for the performance of rituals. Finally, there are the *deacons* who assist the priests in the performance of rituals and work under their direction.

Figure 6.7 Greek Orthodox Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, one of 15 independent Orthodox Patriarchs today.

Source: Wikimedia

The Orthodox Church has a strong tradition of **asceticism,** where individuals separate themselves from the everyday world and restrict their behaviors to avoid any type of over-indulgence, including strict control over things such as food, sleep, and sexual expression. Ascetic individuals typically spend their lives as monks and nuns. Monks are ordained priests, but instead of functioning in the outside world, they live in various types of isolated communities, such as monasteries or small villages; some live a semi-solitary life as hermits associated with a nearby monastery. Bishops are normally selected from among the monks, and most Orthodox seminaries are associated with monasteries. Bishops

are celibate, but in the Orthodox Church, men who are already married may become priests and deacons, although upon the death of their spouse, they cannot remarry.

Orthodox priests participate in a wide variety of activities, including education and counseling, but the focus of their responsibilities is the performance of rituals. They are primarily involved with the performance of social rites of intensification that center around the Divine Liturgy or communion service. The priest also performs rites of passage associated with birth, baptism, marriage, and death. This knowledge and authority comes from the church. As members of a formal religious organization, monks are also considered priests.

The monks on the Holy Mountain of Mt. Athos

On a small peninsula attached to the northeastern corner of Greece is the Autonomous Region of Mount Athos, an ecclesiastical state under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and containing the oldest surviving monasteries.[15] Dating back to its founding around 800 CE during the Byzantine Era, Mt. Athos (also called "Holy Mountain") is a monastic community composed of 20 separate monasteries that subsist primarily as farming communities, producing much of their daily needs and also some limited surplus for export, such as olives, incense, and honey. The monks do not eat any meat, although there is consumption of fish in many of the monasteries, as well as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Periodic fasting is also part of monastic life. For additional income, the monks produce various religious items as part of their workday. Some of the better-known items are prayer ropes (akin to rosaries) and **icons**, religious paintings used for focus and concentration during prayer.

Religious icons
Icons are religious forms of art, most commonly paintings. They are not intended, though, as *objets d'art*, decorative pieces to look at or be used as an adornment on a wall. The icon is meant to be a spiritual channel or passageway. When devotees "pray with an icon," they contemplate the subject of the painting and reflect on the scene, sometimes even feeling themselves drawn into what is depicted. The purpose of the icon is to create a focus for prayer and a physical *pathway* that draws the believer closer to God.

Entrance onto Mt. Athos is highly controlled. While there is a land entrance through Greece, it is not freely open and is difficult terrain infrequently traversed. Most visitors (and the monks themselves when required) travel by boat from the Greek mainland (see Figure 6.8). Women are prohibited from entering Mt. Athos by Greek and monastic laws and non-monastic male visitors (usually secular pilgrims) must obtain a permit (called a *diamonitirion*—διαμονητήριον) in order to visit. Permits are restricted to 100 lay Orthodox and 10–15 non-Orthodox men daily and visits on the Holy Mountain are restricted to four days in duration.

Administration of the Holy Mountain is formed by representatives from each of the 20 monasteries, each one with its own history and traditions. It is considered by most Orthodox churches as the spiritual center of the Orthodox world. Approximately 2,000 monks live permanently on Mt. Athos, and not all of the monasteries are

Figure 6.8 A monastery on Mt. Athos; there are 20 monasteries with different national affiliations on Mt. Athos.

Source: Wikimedia

Greek. There is a Russian monastery housing only Russian Orthodox monks (St. Panteleimon), a Bulgarian monastery (Holy Monastery Zografou), and a Serbian monastery (Chilindari/Hilandar). Several of the monasteries also have associated monastic structures known as sketes, cells, and huts, where monks may elect to live in smaller communities practicing a more ascetic life or even in complete isolation as hermits in cells.[16] While life on Mt. Athos varies depending on the monastic community in which you live, there are certain common characteristics for the *cenobitic* daily life—based on prayer, work, discipline, and sharing:

- **adherence to Byzantine time** (clock and hours)—each day begins at sunset (0:00 hours) instead of midnight; because sunset varies over the year, the relation of the Byzantine clock to Western clocks and calendars varies.
- **praying of the Hours**—periodic gathering for short prayers during the day—the Hours are typically every three hours starting at 6:00 a.m.
- **daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy**—daily corporate prayer and holy readings as a monastic community, often convened as early as 4:00 a.m.
- **hesychastic prayer**—common within the contemplative tradition, hesychastic prayer is a technique that involves chanting or repetitive praying of a simple line of prayer, such as "Lord, have mercy"; this may be prayed almost continually by monks.
- **focus on learning and study**—each of the monasteries values the traditions that are part of the Orthodox faith, and many of the monasteries have extensive historical libraries and archives where monks spend part of their days studying.
- **practice of hospitality**—each of the 20 monasteries also practices pilgrim hospitality, providing drink, meals, and lodging to those visiting the Holy Mountain.

The definition of a religious specialist, as we have seen previously in the description of shamans and priests, is someone who works on behalf of the community. So, what is the monk's community? The monks mention their work is prayer on behalf of humankind.

In 2011, when CBS correspondent Bob Simon, after many requests, was finally allowed to visit and film some aspects of life on Mt. Athos, he noted two things about prayer on Mt. Athos—that prayers had been offered on behalf of the world for more than 1,000

years from this place, and that when he looked at the monks, their lips seemed to always be moving, constantly repeating prayers:

> It becomes like breathing. Some monks say they can pray when they sleep, and they get no more than three hours of sleep a night. But Mount Athos gets more applicants than it can handle—it's harder to get into than Harvard. A man comes as a novice. He's free to leave if he doesn't like it, and the monks can tell him to leave if they don't like him.[17]

Communities such as those on Mt. Athos are called **intentional communities**. These are groups of people—in the case of Mt. Athos, adult men—who voluntarily choose to share in a more focused, committed life that is set apart or separated in some way from a wider society. Intentional communities may be formed of individuals practicing sustainable agriculture, such as ecovillages or off-grid living, but many intentional communities are established by common religious core values.

Other specialists

While shamans and priests are well-studied types of religious specialists, there are other specialists who practice in limited ways. The labels that are used to refer to these specialists often overlap extensively and are not used in any consistent manner. Some of their functions overlap with those of shamans and priests.

A **diviner** is someone who practices divination, a series of techniques and activities used to obtain normally unknowable information, including future happenings, present occurrences in the future at distant locations, and phenomena that touch the supernatural, such as the identification of witches. Some divination techniques involve the interpretation of natural phenomena, like cloud formations, or some activity, such as the turning over of cards. Other techniques involve the diviner entering an altered state of consciousness and obtaining the requested information while in that state.

Diviners usually focus on very practical questions: What is a good time to plant my crop? Will my investment pay off? Whom should I marry? What is an auspicious day for a marriage? A very important type of information that diviners provide is the cause of illness. The diviner often provides the diagnosis, and the healer provides the cure. Diviners usually, but not always, work for private clients and are paid for their services. (Diviners and healers are discussed in Chapters 7 and 11.)

A **prophet** is a mouthpiece of the gods. It is the role of a prophet to communicate the words and will of the gods to his or her community and to act as an intermediary between the gods and the people. Although shamans may occasionally function as prophets, in many cases, the role of prophet is a distinct one. Prophets are found in a wide variety of cultures and include the familiar examples of Moses and Mohammad.

Early written records from southwest Asia indicate that people believed that gods controlled the world and sometimes made their intentions known to select human intermediaries, prophets who interpreted signs or delivered messages from the gods so that the people could better conduct their affairs. Prophets in ancient Mesopotamian and Mediterranean cultures received messages from the gods through divination and oracles. Diviners employed a variety of techniques, like the casting of lots or examining animal entrails

(called *haruspicy*). It was also believed that the gods spoke through the mouths of inspired individuals, like the Oracle of Delphi.

The late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment brought about *empiricism*, a new criterion of knowledge based on observation and critical reasoning, which caused a decline in the importance of prophets as "mediators of revealed truth." Scientists and philosophers challenged the concept of the "truth of revelation" as the debate over the "conceptions of God, religious truth, and divine mediation" became restricted to the intellectual community. Post-Enlightenment Europe was marked by the decline of the authority of the church, while America underwent the separation of church and state.[18]

The declining power of the church and its inability to enforce dogmas contributed to the rise of Enlightenment thinkers who could now express their religious views publicly. New prophets emerged who founded religious sects based on new canons. For instance, Joseph Smith (1804–1844) received revelations from Jesus Christ and archangel Moroni, who gifted him with golden plates containing the Book of Mormon. Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910) inspired the Christian Science movement through her writings, and today's Pentecostal and charismatic movements feature ecstatics "who consider themselves capable of receiving the spirit and speaking as divine agents."[19]

In tribal societies, prophets are clan leaders or others who employ a variety of divination and visionary techniques to obtain special knowledge from divine beings. Typically, the prophet petitions the spirits for special favors. Anthropologists who study prophecy in non-Western societies have dispelled some of the myths about prophets:

> [T]he widespread opinion that ancient prophets were individualists crying to deaf ears from the loneliness of the desert now seems to be a romantic ideal. Rather, groups tend to support prophets who express their interests, while prophets acting entirely on their own rarely find a significant audience.[20]

Handsome Lake was a prophet of the Seneca tribe (Northeast culture area) during the time when the reservation system was first imposed. In 1799, Handsome Lake became ill and appeared to have died. His body was prepared for burial, but he revived. He said that he had had a vision of three messengers who had revealed to him God's will and told him that he was to carry this message back to his people. Later the same year, he received a second revelation in which he was shown heaven and hell and was given moral instructions, which were very similar to Christian ideas. Handsome Lake received further revelations in subsequent years. On the basis of his visions, he preached a revitalization of traditional seasonal ceremonies, a strengthening of the family, and a prohibition against alcohol. Handsome Lake's teachings continued to spread after his death in 1815 and ultimately became the foundation for the Longhouse religion.

The Nuers, a cattle-herding people living in the Eastern Sudan culture area, have a history of prophets. One example is Ngundeng, a nineteenth-century Nuer prophet. He was born in the late 1830s. While there are no historical records of his life, there are many stories, especially those told by his family. According to tradition, he was conceived after his mother was past menopause and was born after a 12-month pregnancy. Ngundeng is said to have spoken to his mother at birth and to possess a number of physical characteristics

attributed to divine influence. Unlike some prophets who make contact with supernatural powers later on in life, Ngundeng was born with that power.

As a young man, he had seizures or altered states of consciousness. He also showed very strange behaviors, such as wandering alone in the bush, fasting, and drinking nothing but water for long periods of time. As he began to eat tobacco, mud, grass, and human feces, he became very thin, and his hair grew long and matted. Then, he was possessed by a god, who revealed himself to be Deng. Ngundeng, Deng's prophet, began to make prophecies and developed a reputation as a peacemaker.

Nuers believe that prophets are chosen by a god and are then able to predict the future, cure the sick, ensure the fertility of women and cows, influence the growth of a good crop, and more. Stories began to circulate about Ngundeng's ability to take a life through words or even thoughts. The ability to kill was associated with the ability to control life. The god Deng was a life-giver, controlling rain and the procreation of cattle and children, but he was also a god of death. Ngundeng gained a wide reputation for making barren women fertile and halting epidemic disease. He died in 1906.

Over 100 years later, the prophet Ngundeng played an important role in the movement for an independent state in southern Sudan. Ngundeng had a *dang,* or ceremonial rod, which was inherited by Ngundeng's son. When the son was killed in battle in the resistance against British colonial rule, the *dang* was taken as a souvenir to England. Years later, the *dang* was sold at auction to a British scholar, Douglas Johnson, who had studied Nuer culture. Douglas returned it to the Nuers in 2009. The rod had become a symbol of the Nuers' drive for independence from Sudan.

Kiowa owl prophets

Plains Indian shamans performed divinatory rites designed to find lost people, animals, and objects or to predict the future, like the Lakota Yuwipi or Algonquin Spirit Lodge rites. Similar rites practiced by Kiowas involved shamans called *owl prophets*. Kiowa eschatological beliefs associate owls with the spirits of the deceased, the spirits of shamans, or the transformed souls of evil sorcerers. Owls, like ghosts, are avoided. Contrary to the Kiowa majority, nineteenth-century owl prophets obtained their powers directly from this dreaded bird. Every owl prophet understood owl language, communicated with the dead using owls as mediums, and consulted his "all knowing spirit" to discern future happenings.

Analogous to the Algonquin Spirit Lodge rite, owl prophets held séances in their tipis to locate missing persons or lost objects, or to prophesy the future; divination rituals attempted to divulge the whereabouts of men presumed dead or separated from war parties or to pinpoint the location of missing horses. When an owl prophet was consulted, a special tipi was erected before sundown, and then a smaller tipi, one and a half feet in height, was placed inside the larger tipi on the west side for the owl spirit during the séance. Only the owl prophet and his clients were permitted inside the tipi during the divinatory rite. Anyone else permitted in the area was required to prostrate himself on the ground outside the tipi, fearful of seeing the owl spirit, incurring its wrath, and risk having dirt kicked in his eyes. Each ceremony began with drumming and low singing from inside the tipi, and then suddenly the owl spirit was heard alighting on top of the tipi poles, causing the tipi to shake. Shortly afterward, the spirit spoke, identifying the soul of the deceased person

it possessed, then asked what information was sought. The owl spirit departed, returning shortly afterward, but this time entered the tipi through the smoke hole and descended into the miniature tipi, through which it spoke, imparting knowledge to the concerned family members of a missing relative or the owner of a lost horse.[21]

Conclusion

So far in this book, we have discussed many of the basic concepts and components of religious systems, such as narratives, worldviews, symbols, rituals, altered states of consciousness, and ritual specialists. Religious specialists often are the main repositories of religious knowledge, retelling key narratives, manipulating religious symbols, and entering into altered states of consciousness through ritual practices. Specialists play a key role as mediators between the natural and supernatural worlds. As we move into the next section of the book, we will shift our attention to those supernatural forces and beings. In the study of religion, all of these topics are woven together. For example, the conceptions people have of the nature of the gods influence the character of the rituals that will be directed toward the gods. An important factor in a culture's worldview is how and in what ways supernatural phenomena and powers manifest themselves.

Summary

Most religious systems identify specialists to carry out specific religious functions. Two of the most frequently found specialists are shamans and priests.

A *shaman* receives their power directly from the spirit world and acquires the ability to do sacred things through personal communication with the supernatural. Shamans are part-time religious specialists whose authority lies in their charisma and ability to heal. A Siberian shaman works with a spirit familiar or animal soul that helps the shaman in their work of dispelling a disease-causing spirit or retrieving a lost soul.

Priests are full-time religious specialists associated with formal religious institutions and tend to be found in more complex, food-producing societies. The priest acts as a representative of the community to the deity or deities and is responsible for the performance of prescribed rituals. The skill of a priest is based on the learning of ritual knowledge and sacred narratives and on knowledge of how to perform these rituals for the benefit of the community. Priestly rituals usually take place in a space set aside for ceremonial activities, such as a temple or shrine.

Other kinds of religious specialists include diviners and prophets. Diviners can discern causes and the course of action to take in the future. A prophet is a mouthpiece of the gods. It is the role of the prophet to communicate the words and will of the gods to his or her community and act as an intermediary between the people and the gods.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 6.

Study questions

1. Religious specialists in U.S. society are often distinguished by a particular mode of dress, grooming, and general behavior. Some specialists are subject to special rules, such as celibacy in Catholicism. What is the function of setting religious specialists apart from other members of the community? How does this help the individual in his or her function as a religious specialist?
2. Contrast shamans and priests. What are the primary differences between shamans and priests? How might communities interact differently with each of them? How would the relationships they have with their clients or congregants be different?
3. Shamanism is rapidly growing in urban areas such as Korea. What do you think this is due to? What does shamanism offer that is different from more traditional mainline religious traditions?
4. How is neoshamanism different from classic shamanism? Do you think the practice of neoshamanism is an example of cultural appropriation? Why or why not?
5. Although we talk about shamans and priests typically appearing in different kinds of societies, there are cases such as Korea and Okinawa in which both types of practitioners are present. What are the advantages of having a pluralistic religious society?
6. The monks of Mt. Athos live within a closed, intentional religious community. What do you believe are the pros and cons of living a life as a member of a religious order, such as a monastery?

Notes

1 This ritual, known as Voladores, was added in 2009 to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. See https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ritual-ceremony-of-the-voladores-00175

2 A.J. Rock and S. Krippner, "Proposed Criteria for the Necessary Conditions for Shamanic Journeying Imagery." *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 22(2):215–226, 2008.

3 Not all shamanic cultures see the Lowerworld as associated with darkness and evil spirits. For some, there is assistance and danger in each of the levels and the Lowerworld is specifically related to OTPs (other-than-human-persons).

4 T. Yamada, "Through Dialogue with Contemporary Yakut Shamans: How They Revive Their Worldview." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 7:4–5, 1996.

5 M.M. Balzar, "Healing Failed Faith? Contemporary Siberian Shamanism," *Anthropology and Humanism* 26:134–149, 2002.

6 Y.K. Harvey, *Six Korean Women: The Socialization of Shamans*, American Ethnological Society Monograph No. 65 (1979), pp. 31–32.

7 See https://thegroundtruthproject.org/amid-economic-political-tensions-shamanism-regains-popularity-south-korea/

8 M. Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

9 C. Castañeda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

10 M. Harner, *The Way of the Shaman*, 10th anniv. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 1990).

11 The Foundation for Shamanic Studies at www.shamanism.org/fssinfo/index.html
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13 R.L. Bunzel, *Zuni Ceremonialism Three Studies* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), pp. 509–534.
14 S. Sered, "Symbolic Illnesses, Real Handprints, and Other Bodily Marks: Autobiographies of Okinawan Priestesses and Shamans." *Ethos* 25:408–427, 1997.
15 Mt. Athos was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1988—see https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/454
16 A photojournal of life on Mt. Athos is available at www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jan/05/the-holy-mountain-monks-of-mount-athos-photo-essay
17 To view the footage of correspondent Bob Simon's 2011 visit to Mt. Athos, see www.cbs.com/shows/video/euRhNjMYgf7fw6ocOrjgHLoFWTUBLcdQ/
18 G.T. Sheppard and W.E. Herbretchtsmeir, "Prophecy." In *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, M. Eliade, ed., Vol. 12 (New York: MacMillian Publishing Company, 1987), p. 9.
19 Ibid., pp. 9–11.
20 Ibid., p. 11.
21 B.R. Kracht, *Kiowa Belief and Ritual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 109.

Chapter 7

Magic and divination

Like many of the terms used in this textbook, *magic*—in the title of this textbook—evokes varied opinions. Some say they do not practice magic because their particular religion does not believe in it, whereas others see magic as the superstitious beliefs and practices of "primitive" peoples, something false or unreal that does not work. Maybe they imagine a rabbit being pulled out of a hat or an elephant disappearing before their eyes. What is popularly called magic anthropologists call *illusion*—magic in this sense refers to acts that rely on some sort of trickery and deception. Entertainers who perform such illusions freely admit that they are manipulating not the supernatural world but rather human perception. As anthropologists use the term, **magic** refers to rituals by which a person can compel the supernatural to behave in certain ways. Closely related to magic are supernatural ways of gaining information about the unknown, be it what will happen in the future, what is happening in some faraway place, or something as specific as the cause of an illness. These techniques are aspects of *divination*. As we will see, humans are practitioners of magic.

The nature of magic

Life is full of surprises, some good, some bad. Cross-culturally, most people in the world have concepts of good and bad. For instance, Lakotas distinguish between the Red Road (good) versus the Black Road (evil), and Kiowas differentiate between good and bad medicine; analogous to other Indigenous peoples, they believe these forces must remain in balance. They clearly understand that we have choices: can we do the right thing and make the right decisions?

Many societies recognize that when magic is performed in public, it is usually positive, as in technological or ideological rituals. Such would be a use of "good magic." Conversely, rituals performed in private reflect "bad magic." For example, followers of Vodou in Haiti and Candomblé in Brazil distinguish between good magic performed publicly and bad magic practiced in private. Importantly, the difference between good and bad magic is a matter of perception: what is good for one person or group might be bad for another. Noted Russian author Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) addressed this issue in his fable (Figure 7.1), "Why There is Evil in the World" (Box 7.1).

DOI: 10.4324/9781003438762-7

Box 7.1 Why there is evil in the world

The setting is a forest inhabited by a hermit and the animals he befriended. Oftentimes, they held rap sessions to talk about issues of the world. During one of their gatherings, they discussed the presence of Evil in the world. The characters participating included Raven, Dove, Snake, and Stag (male deer). Each gave his opinion about the presence of Evil in the world.

Raven spoke first, blaming Evil on world hunger. From his perspective, when there is enough food, he sits happily on a branch by himself, eating and thinking good thoughts about the world. However, when food is not abundant, and the ravens are starving, their outlook is not so bright. Even worse, when Raven sees food from afar and flies down to get it, he is chased away by wolves and dogs or by humans throwing sticks and stones. Hence, Evil is caused by hunger.

Dove disagreed, claiming that Evil stems from love. Because doves live in monogamous pairs, they constantly worry about their companions. When searching for a lost mate, the dove often finds his mate in the clutches of a hawk or, even worse, a human snare. Mourning for his lost mate, he forgoes food and water and mourns until his own death. So many doves have died this way. Hence, Evil is caused by love.

Hissing and disagreeing, Snake suggested that Evil derives from ill temper. Why? Because snakes are an ill-tempered species that easily fall into rages, hissing and biting, only thinking about revenge. Furthermore, snakes have no pity and are capable of biting their own mother and father. Hence, Evil is caused by an ill temper.

No one was surprised when Stag disagreed with everyone else and suggested that Evil comes from fear. Without fear, everything would be all right. Stag claimed that his antlers are great defensive weapons and that speed is an asset; however, his species is easily spooked by any noise. A creaking twig or rustling leaves cause panic and flight, often sending the stag headlong over a precipice or into the path of humans. Living in fear, Stag sleeps with one eye open, ready for danger. Hence, Evil is caused by fear.

Speaking last, the hermit synopsized the causes of Evil: "Not from hunger, nor from love, nor from ill temper, nor from fear come all our troubles. But all the Evil that is in the world is due to our different natures. Hence come hunger and love, ill temper and fear."

Importantly, the story demonstrates that Evil is "part of the cosmic order of the universe, making it an integral part of life. What is Evil for one creature is not necessarily Evil for another." The dove eaten by the hawk has faced Evil, but the hawk has had a good day. Such is life in the food chain.[1]

In order to promote a good life and avert evil, humans conduct magical rituals to control life. Although Westerners scoff at the idea of magical charms, incantations, and spells, we rely on them when we face risk and uncertainty. Perhaps we feel threatened, or unexpected occurrences and outside forces disrupt our lives. A traveler might say a brief prayer before departing on a long car trip, accompanied by an image of Saint Christopher dangling from the rearview mirror. Why do some automobile passengers hold their breath when passing a cemetery or lift their feet off the floorboard when crossing railroad tracks? Some allege these are silly superstitions, but they are *protective rites* compelling the supernatural to behave in a certain way, no different from the invocations by Kiowa prayer warriors for overseas soldiers or Zuni hunters bearing prey animal fetishes. In Chapter 11, we will examine how patients depend on the magic of medical practitioners when ill.

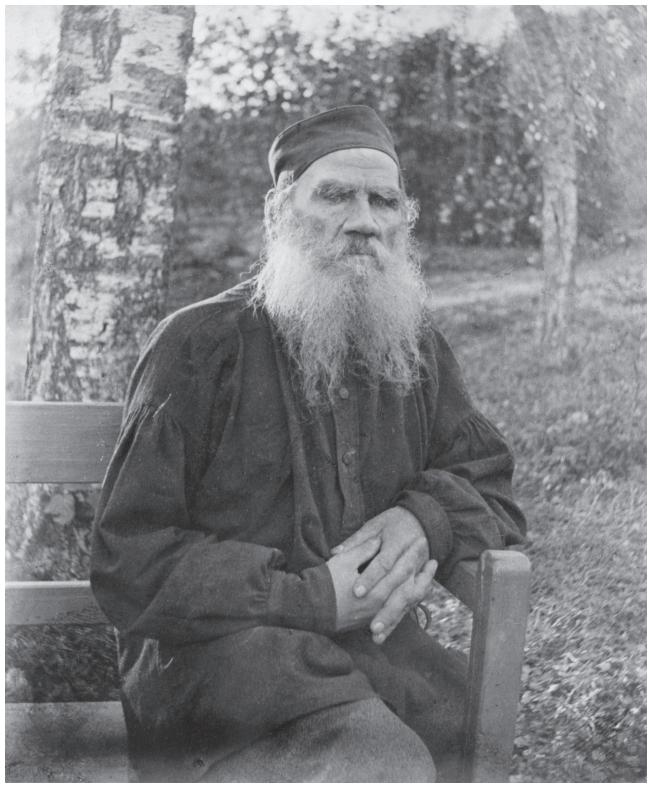

Figure 7.1 Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910).
Source: Wikimedia

Consider a subsistence farmer in a small-scale society who is growing crops to feed his family. A subsistence farmer is very knowledgeable about his craft. He is familiar with various types of soils, knows the best time to plant, and knows how to build a fence to keep out wild animals. A lot is riding on his success. Failure to produce an adequate crop could lead to malnutrition or starvation for his family. No matter how carefully and skillfully the farmer performs his tasks, bad things can and do happen. Rains fail to come, or an infestation of insect pests destroys his plants. He probably wonders, "Why is this happening to me? What can I do to prevent these things from happening?"

To answer such questions, our farmer might turn to religious ritual to invoke the influence of a deity. Perhaps he will present an offering to a god and ask the god to bring rain, or he might build a small spirit house in the corner of his field and, by presenting the spirit with food offerings, try to persuade the spirit to take up residence and guard the fields.

In these examples, our farmer is accessing supernatural power through the intercession of a supernatural anthropomorphic causal agent such as a god or spirit. He brings this supernatural power to bear upon his problems through rituals in which he attempts to persuade a deity to intercede in his life to bring about desired outcomes, such as a good crop. However, the success of this enterprise lies in the hands of the god or spirit, who might or might not be inclined to do as the farmer asks.

Supernatural power also exists in other, more diffuse forms. (For example, we examined a supernatural power called *mana* in Chapter 4.) Instead of relying on the good will of a supernatural being, our farmer can manipulate supernatural power as a more direct means

of achieving his ends. All he needs is the correct ritual and he can "unlock" that power to achieve his objective directly. This is what we mean by the term *magic*.

John Middleton observes that:

> Most peoples in the world perform acts by which they intend to bring about certain events or conditions. . . . The acts typically comprise behavior such as manipulation of objects and recitation of verbal formulas or spells. In a given society magic may be performed by a specialist.[2]

Anthropologist Donald Hill defines magic as "the manipulation of enigmatic forces for practical ends. Magical means are said to be extranatural or supernatural, and the objectives of magical intervention, natural. Magic is an attempt to tip the odds in favor of the practitioner." Accordingly, the magician uses special objects or bundles, potions, spells, or incantations to bring about changes in people, events, or objects. In foraging societies, shamans are the magicians summoned to perform healing and divination rituals. Religious specialists in Indigenous societies are solicited for their magical powers to influence hunting, healing, love, and war, to provide protection and economic success, or to harm or kill another person.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Westerners often distinguish between religion and magic, claiming to engage in the former but not the latter. Hill suggests that Westerners perceive magic negatively because religion is seen as a group phenomenon, whereas magic is "used for individual purposes. Thus the conflict between the social good and individual need sometimes finds expression as a conflict between religion and magic."[3]

Magic and religion

Products of their times, early anthropologists were ethnocentric when it came to the study of magic, often placing it in a separate category from religion. British anthropologist Edward Tylor, who discussed magic in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871), argued that magic is a logical way of thinking for cultures that are "less advanced."[4] Tylor believed that, in tribal cultures, the magician takes the same approach as a scientist, but the magician makes the mistake of assuming a causal relationship simply because things appear to be similar, when this relationship, according to Tylor, does not exist. Tylor did not include magic in the realm of religion, which he considered more advanced, because he claimed that no spirits are involved and spirits, he felt, were necessary for inclusion in his definition of religion.

Sir James Frazer, an anthropologist like Tylor, believed that magic was a *pseudoscience*, a false science based on intentional actions that did not work.[5] Like Tylor, Frazer was part of the evolutionary school (see Chapter 1) and thought that magic was an early stage that would be replaced by religion. Religion was seen as different from magic because it was based on the persuasion of supernatural beings rather than the manipulation of supernatural forces. Some evolutionary school thinkers believed religion itself would give way to

science over time. Of course, none of this has happened; in most societies, magic, religion, and science coexist.

Theoreticians associated with the functional school also saw differences between religion and magic. Émile Durkheim distinguished magic from religion, but he focused on the social context.[6] Unlike religious rituals that tend to involve the whole community, magic is often centered on the needs and desires of an individual. A farmer wants rain; a young man wants a wife; a woman needs a cure for her child's illness. In contrast to religious rituals that are carried out for the good of the community, magic is directed at very practical ends as articulated by an individual. Durkheim wrote, "In all history, we do not find a single religion without a church . . . There is no church of magic."[7] However, generalizations are just that, and this one is not true. Magic is frequently used in community-wide public rituals to bring rain or defend the community against an enemy. It is not solely related to individuals.

Bronislaw Malinowski saw a difference in the purpose of magic and religious ritual. Religion is seen as "an end in itself," while magic is different. Bronislaw Malinowski wrote: "While in the magical act the underlying idea and aim is always clear, straightforward, and definite, in the religious ceremony there is no purpose directed toward a subsequent event."[8] In other words, religious ceremonies are "expressive without purpose," whereas magical rites have a practical purpose. Some nonmagical rituals certainly have very specific goals—coming-of-age ceremonies, for example—but many rituals are more generalized, especially social rites of intensification.

When Malinowski studied the Trobriand Islanders, he noted that they did not use magic in lagoon fishing because it is not dangerous. However, open-sea fishing is dangerous and is accompanied by extensive rituals designed to assure safety and success. He writes: "We do not find magic wherever the pursuit is certain, reliable, and well under the control of rational methods and technological processes. Further, we find magic where the element of danger is conspicuous."[9]

However, anthropologist Annette Weiner, who did more recent ethnographic research in the Trobriands, notes that although lagoon fishing is relatively safe, there are other reasons to perform magic in the lagoon environment. She writes:

> They "turn" to magic, not out of psychological distress over a physical environment out of control, but when it is essential that they produce a large catch that must be used for an important exchange that has social and political consequences. To control the actions of the wind and the fish is ultimately proof of one's ability to control an exchange, thereby providing a measure of control over others.[10]

The issue of whether or not magic is part of religion or a separate category altogether is largely a function of how religion itself is defined.

Today, most anthropologists consider magic an important part of religion because it is associated with supernatural mechanisms and is often used in conjunction with religious practices.

Rules of magic

Magic tends to follow certain principles that were first described by Sir James G. Frazer in his book *The Golden Bough* (1890).[11] Frazer proposed the **Law of Sympathy**, which states that magic depends on the apparent association or agreement between things. There are two parts (or sub-laws) within the Law of Sympathy. The first is the **Law of Similarity**, which states that things that are alike are, in fact, the same. The second is the **Law of Contagion**, which states that things that were once in contact continue to be connected even after the connection is severed. The Law of Similarity gives rise to **homeopathic**, or **imitative, magic,** and the Law of Contagion gives rise to **contagious magic**.

Homeopathic magic

Homeopathic, or imitative magic, assumes that there is a causal relationship between things that appear to be similar. The similarity can be physical or behavioral. The most familiar kind of homeopathic magic is **image magic**. This is the practice of making an image to represent a living person or animal, which can then be killed or injured by doing things to the image, such as sticking pins into the image or burning it. The first is intended to cause pain in the body of the victim that corresponds to the place on the image where the pin was stuck; burning the image might bring about a high fever. Vodou practitioners in Haiti make *wanga*, magic charms or fetishes infused with prayers and songs, for protection or to attack enemies in order to cause sickness and misfortune. Animals drawn on the walls of caves with arrows through them might be an example of image magic. Here, the artist is creating the hunt in art. Depicting a successful hunt will bring about a similar outcome in the real hunt.

There are many examples of behaviors that imitate a desired end, thus causing the end to occur. Sometimes, these are found embedded within rituals that are not specifically seen as magic rituals, for example, the **increase rite** of the Australian Aborigines. These are essentially fertility rituals that function to facilitate the successful reproduction of the totem animal (see Chapter 4). They are performed annually and are seen as essential parts of the animals' life cycle. The men who perform the ritual draw sacred designs on their bodies and adorn themselves with various symbolic objects. In this way, the men *become* the totem animal in a magical sense. Their behavior, often expressed in dance, brings about a *sympathetic behavior* in the actual animal. For example, the acting out of the copulation and birth of an animal species will translate into reproductive success for those animals.

The principle of sympathy explains many folk customs, including those in American society. Folklorist Wayland D. Hand has collected many examples, such as walnuts being good for the brain because of their appearance.[12] After all, does not the shell resemble a skull, and the meat inside resemble the brain?

Many practices labeled as alternative medicine or homeopathic medicine in American society are based on the Law of Similarity. Traditional herbal medicine is often based on the **doctrine of signatures**, in which natural objects resembling body parts were used to treat diseases that afflicted those areas. For instance, crushed walnuts were used to treat headaches. Flowers of the eyebright plant resemble big, bright eyes and were used to treat eye diseases (Figure 7.2).

These beliefs date back to the Middle Ages and were formalized by the 1621 publication, *The Signature of All Things*, by Jakob Boehme (1575–1624), a German Christian mystic.

Herbalists and "wise women" were the main practitioners. Christian and Muslim followers of this folk medicine believed that God/Allah purposely created medicinal plants to treat the body parts they resembled. William Cole (1626–1662), an English botanist, believed that God gave certain plants "signatures" so they could be used as medicines. Today, homeopathic medicine is based on signatures with the concept of *like produces like*.

Figure 7.2 Eyebright Plant (*Euphrasia* sp.); this herbal remedy was used to treat eye redness and irritation, partly because the flower resembles an eye.

Source: Wikimedia

Similar analogies are the basis of many food prohibitions observed by pregnant women among the Bengs of the Ivory Coast, West Africa. A pregnant woman should not eat meat from the bushbuck antelope, which has a striped coat. If she does, her child will be born with striped skin. During pregnancy, a woman should give herself enemas using a particular vine that has slippery leaves; then, the infant will move quickly through the birth canal during birth. The soon-to-be new mother is also told that her behavior during her pregnancy will be reflected in her child, especially negative behaviors. A pregnant woman who steals will have a child with the "long arm of a thief." Some in the United States think that if the mother is anxious or nervous during pregnancy, the baby will be nervous and fussy.

Religious relics

In 1988, Sri Dalada Maligawa (ශ්‍රී දළදා මාළිගාව), a Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka, was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site because it is a holy site for many Buddhists. Inside the temple are the remains of what is believed to be the Buddha's tooth. This religious relic, which has been considered sacred since the Buddha's death when it was reportedly removed from the funeral pyre ashes, is venerated three times a day with prayer and immersed in herbal waters on Wednesdays (called Nanumura Mangallaya). Water that has been in contact with the tooth becomes sacred and healing to those who receive it.

Contagious magic

Contagious magic is based on the premise that things that were once in contact always maintain a connection. An example of contagious magic from our own culture is the rabbit's foot. While it is a prey animal for a wide variety of other animals, there are numerous rabbits. This means that the predators are not always successful, so rabbits must be lucky. If we carry a part of this lucky animal, the luck will rub off on us.

Wayland Hand notes that there are many examples of folk medicine in the United States that are based on the principle of contagion. Many of these involve transference of the disease into some object. The object could then be disposed of, thus curing the illness. Warts could be cured by rubbing a penny on the wart

and then burying the coin. In Mark Twain's classic *Tom Sawyer*, a commentary on popular American culture of its time, Huck Finn had a sure cure for warts: take a dead cat to a cemetery, wait near the fresh grave of an evil person; when a devil comes to get his soul at midnight, chant the appropriate spell while tossing the dead cat after him; the warts will follow the demon. One cure for whooping cough was to tie a caterpillar in a band around the neck of the child. The illness disappeared as the caterpillar died, the disease having been successfully transferred to the animal.

We also see the principle of contagion in modern society with the collection of, and prices paid for, anything used by a celebrity. A sweaty shirt worn by one of your professors would get a very different reaction than a shirt that had been worn by your favorite rock star or actor.

Anything connected with the person can be used in contagious magic. Hair, a nail cutting (exuviae), or even one of their belongings (such as clothes) can affect the person it came from. In fact, a hair from an enemy's head would be highly prized by a sorcerer seeking to create harm. Someone can be attacked through their footprints, name, shadow, or reflection (although these also involve soul beliefs). Sorcery will be discussed more in Chapter 10.

Religious relics and the Shakers

Religious **relics** are products of contagious magic. They are items associated with, connected to, or even part of the body of people who are considered sacred or holy. Some of the more unusual relics are the Buddha's tooth, the Shroud of Turin, the blood of St. Januarius, and the footprints of the Prophet Muhammed. Relics can also be items associated with a religious group.

Figure 7.3 Shaker rocking chair, ca. 1878–1910; Shaker rocking chairs are so prized and iconic as Shaker artifacts that Shaker Sister Mildred Barker once said she expected to be remembered as a chair.

Source: Wikimedia

The Shakers, known formally as the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, are an agrarian communal religious group that began in the U.S. in 1794 when Mother Ann and eight followers arrived from England. Living together as a religious community, the membership practiced all kinds of craftsmanship to make a living—seed production, culinary herbs, medicinals, furniture, boxes, silk, and clothing (Figure 7.3). In the 1930s, historian and collector Edward Deming Andrews and his wife, Faith, became interested in the extant Shaker communities in Kentucky and New England. Enthralled with Shaker religious history, their innovative design and craftsmanship, as well as the historical and commercial value of Shaker furniture and other artifacts, the Andrews began amassing huge collections of Shaker memorabilia, including all types of furniture, Shaker pamphlets and publications, and even spiritual drawings detailing messages and visions from spirits and the deceased. They

curated many of these items (providing historical information on the items' provenience and use) and later donated most of the collections to the museum at Yale University and other museums. These became the earliest known exhibitions of Shaker artifacts.

For much of the American public at that time, it was through the collections exhibited, the books, articles, and presentations of the Andrews that they were first introduced to this Christian sect whose founding coincided with U.S. independence. By the 1970s, Shaker memorabilia had gained the attention of the auction houses and the wealthy, and these functional use items had taken on the life of religious relics. Over the past 50 years, prices that wealthy buyers are willing to pay for these "sacred" items have been exorbitant—$221,000 for a Shaker work counter ca. 1830 (purchased at auction in 1991); $98,400 for a small Shaker sewing table ca. 1840 (purchased 2020); $55,000 for a small Shaker candle stand ca.1840 (purchased 2022); $16,000 for a Shaker chair ca. 1840 (purchased 2022).

These pieces were originally produced as very affordable, high-quality use items for a local market, not as museum pieces and relics. The Shakers themselves were never involved in the auction market—the auctions have been associated with non-Shaker speculators and collectors. These pieces, because of their association with a specific religious group and a certain period of American history, have become religious relics for a secular world.

Magic in society

Magic plays an important role in a society's religious practices. We will examine the operation of magic in three societies: the Trobriand Islanders, the Azandes, and the Kiowas. We will also look at the role of magic in Wicca, a Neo-Pagan religion.

Magic in the Trobriand Islands

The Trobriand Islanders, who live off the western coast of New Guinea, distinguish among three types of knowledge. First, there is *knowledge of things* in the everyday world, which is shared by all or a large group of adult members of the society. This is what children learn from their parents: boys learn how to garden, and girls learn how to weave mats.

A second form of knowledge is more specialized and is shared with a limited number of individuals. This includes *expert knowledge* that is necessary for task specializations, such as sailing or woodcarving. This form also includes knowledge of particular magical rituals that tend to be learned by many members of the society.

The highest level includes *knowledge of the most complex and valued technological skills*, such as canoe building, as well as knowledge of myths, songs, and dances. These skills are important to the community, and a person who has such skills is called *tokabitam*, "man with knowledge." This level of knowledge includes important magic, such as rain and garden magic, which is of great importance to the community. The relatively few people who possess this knowledge and skill are very important people in terms of both prestige and wealth. Because of the value of these services, the *tokabitam* receive remuneration for their work.

Learning magic

Although many forms of magic are well known among adult members of a community, some magical lore is the private property of individuals. The most common way to obtain

magic is to learn it from one's parents, grandparents, or other kin. Thus, certain types of magic become associated with particular family lines. Sometimes, the magic is owned by a more remote relative or a nonrelative. In this case, the person who desires the magic will purchase it from its owner.

A Trobriand Islander who wants to learn particular magic will present a series of gifts over time to the owner as a way of convincing the individual to bestow that knowledge. It is to the advantage of the owner of the magic to spread the learning process over a long period of time, thus maximizing the number of gifts given. If the owner dies before all of the magic has been transferred to the student, however, the magic might not be effective because the transfer of the magic is incomplete. Today, many young men travel to the capital of Papua New Guinea to find work. Because magic is important across cultures, these men often bring home manufactured goods and magic purchased from tribes living in and around Port Moresby.

In learning magic, one must learn the words that are spoken—usually called a **spell**. The spell, which can also be called a blessing, curse, or incantation, is an oral text transmitted without change. The slightest deviation from its traditional form would invalidate the magic. Because spells are usually passed down unchanged from generation to generation, they often come to be recited in an archaic form of the language and might include words that no longer have meaning. If the magic comes from a different cultural group, the spell may even be recited in a foreign language. In the Trobriand Islands, the ritual must be performed precisely. The slightest slip in the ritual, such as a minute omission in its performance or a seemingly insignificant change in its sequence, invalidates the magic. This is not the case in all societies. Among the Azandes of the Sudan, described in the following section, magical rituals are variable, and the spell is unformulated.

Trobriand garden magic

Despite all the knowledge, skills, and hard work that a Trobriand farmer puts into gardening, bad things can still happen. Rain might fail to come, or insect pests might destroy a crop. To deal with these seemingly uncontrollable problems, the farmer turns to magic.

In farming, good fertility and a good crop are attributed to the skill and knowledge of the farmer and the superiority of his magic. There is a clear distinction between work that must be performed manually, and work performed through magic. Together, they make up a complex gardening system.

The Trobriand Islanders recognize many types of soils; they discriminate between many varieties of yams; they build fences to keep out pigs. The Islanders are very clear about what tasks are considered work and what is considered magic. The construction of a spirit house is strictly magic, but weeding is work. Work and magic are essential to the success of a garden. *Good luck*, a better-than-expected result, is confirmation of the strength of the magic; *bad luck*, a poor crop, points out a deficiency in the magic.

Malinowski describes many garden rituals. One ritual occurs before a field is cleared of brush: in the morning, the men gather together around the magician, a religious specialist, who fasts until the completion of the ritual. The men, whose bodies are painted for the special occasion, pick up their axes, which have been magically prepared. They march to

the garden, where the magician takes his hereditary wand of office in his left hand and his axe in his right hand and enters the garden. He cuts a small sapling and recites a spell:

> This is our bad wood, O ancestral spirits! O bush-pig, who fightest, O bush-pig from the great stone in the rayboag, O bush-pig of the garden stakes, O bush-pig drawn by evil smells, O bush-pig of the narrow face, O bush-pig of the ugly countenance, O fierce bush-pig. Thy sail, O bush-pig, is in thy ear, thy steering-oar is in thy tail. I kick thee from behind, I despatch thee. Go away. Go to Ulawola. Return whence you have come. It burns your eyes, it turns your stomach.[13]

The sapling, which is then thrown into the forest, stands for evil influences and the bush-pig, which causes damage by digging up gardens. This ritual is followed by others, creating a cycle of rituals that parallels the work that must be accomplished to secure a bountiful harvest.

Magic among the Azandes

One of the most detailed studies of the religious system of a small-scale society is that of the Azandes conducted by E.E. Evans-Pritchard in the 1920s and 1930s.[14] Azandes live in the southern Sudan, Congo culture area, which, at the time of Evans-Pritchard's research, was a British colony.

Among the Azandes, magic involves the use of objects, usually of plant material, called *medicines*. A medicine is an object in which supernatural power resides. To access this power, to change a piece of wood or plant material into medicine, requires ritual. The object, which may be consumed in the ritual or kept intact for long periods of time, then becomes the center of magical rituals.

There are large numbers of plants from which medicines are derived (Figure 7.4). Sometimes, the association between the nature of the plant and its use is clearly based on the doctrine of signatures. This is recognized by Azandes, who point out that a particular plant is used because of its resemblance to something associated with the purpose of the magic. A good example is a particular fruit that is full of a milky sap. The fruit resembles the breast of a woman with a young child. A drink is made from the root of the plant and given to a mother who is having difficulty producing enough milk for her infant.

The thousands of available medicines can be placed in a series of categories based on their purposes. There are those that control nature, such

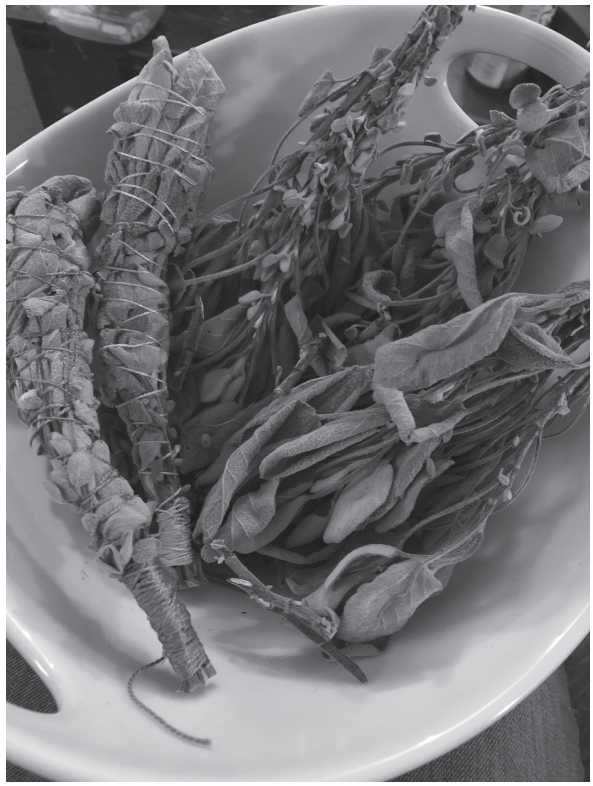

Figure 7.4 Sage bundles are medicine for many North American Indigenous peoples.

Source: Wikimedia

as rain; one is used to delay sunset so that the person will have time to reach home before dark, and many medicines are associated with horticulture and hunting. For example, medicines can be used to direct the flight of a spear or an arrow into the prey and to protect the hunter from dangerous animals. Other medicines are directed to humans: craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, have their own magic to aid in their tasks, and some medicines are used against witches and sorcerers. Magic is also used to bring about success in love, guarantee a safe journey, or to avenge murder, theft, and adultery. Finally, diseases are cured by using specific medicines.

There are several ways in which the medicine can be used. For example, plant material may be burned and, using oils, made into a paste that can be rubbed into incisions made on the face or torso, or the medicine may be made into an infusion to drink. A man may make a whistle out of a particular variety of wood and keep this whistle tied around his waist. He blows it in the morning soon after waking up as a protection against misfortune. This very simple type of ritual is very common. Some key rituals may be performed privately so that an enemy will not know that they are being performed and use other magic to interfere with the intended effects of the ritual. In some cases, a man might not want others to know that he owns a particular medicine because he does not want to be pestered by people to perform the magic for them.

Zande magic rites are not very formal and standardized, nor are they usually public. Although there are some public rituals, such as war magic performed by a chief, most magic is performed by a single individual for their immediate need, and the order of their performance will vary.

The magic rites are usually quite simple and involve manipulating the medicine and reciting a spell to the medicine to tell it what needs to be done. Unlike magical spells in other societies, the Azande power does not reside in the spell itself but in the medicine. The spell serves simply as a way of waking up the power and giving it clear instructions. If the medicine is handled correctly and the instructions are clear, the magic will work. Another requirement is the observation of a number of tabus. Commonly, they include abstention from sexual activity and the avoidance of certain foods. If the tabu is not observed, the magic will fail.

Whether or not a particular medicine is good or bad often depends on context. For example, magic that is worked to kill someone out of spite is bad. It is often worked in secret at night. If a person who works bad magic is discovered, he or she will be killed. On the other hand, lethal magic that is legally sanctioned is good magic. This includes magic used to kill witches and sorcerers. Sorcery also can be dealt with by counter-magic and antidotes.

Kiowa power contests

In tribal societies, shamans periodically demonstrate their powers through magical feats to convince people that, indeed, they have power. Anthropologist William Lyons maintains that these **power displays** are actually preambles to healing rites in Native cultures.[15] In earlier ethnographic and historical literature, accounts of power displays refer to them as legerdemain and jugglery—in other words, tricks. Native American activist and theologian Vine Deloria, Jr. (1933–2005), however, challenges Western science to seek meaning and values from the "miracles" of the medicine men. Similarly, anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons (1875–1941), in her descriptions of feats of Pueblo shamans—making corn plants grow in front of observers, walking on or swallowing hot coals, or stick-swallowing—acknowledges

that these were all "convincing manifestations of power."[16]

Through magical feats, nineteenth-century Kiowa shamans demonstrated their powers during curing episodes, and sometimes, rival medicine men engaged in public power contests. In both instances, they regurgitated the *gietso*—the magical powers living in their stomach—to display their powers for public viewing. Osonte, "No Voice," or "Hoarse Voice," had Buffalo power and sometimes spat out a miniature bison that would grow to a length of about ten inches. A woman named Tsodlte, "Spotted Wing," possessed Snake power and had the remarkable ability to eject up to four large rattlesnakes from her mouth. More incredible is the case of Pododlte, who could cough up a pistol and swallow it again. The pistol resided in his stomach with a spider, centipede, turtle, and a butcher knife.[17]

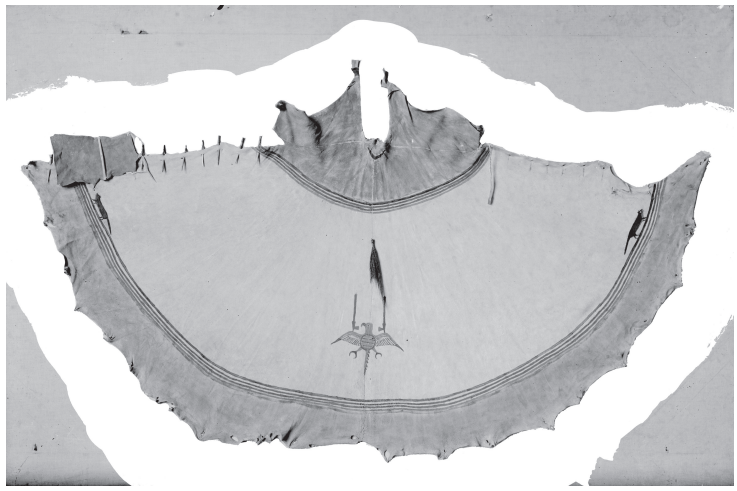

Figure 7.5 Snapping Turtle's Tipi (Kiowa), 1873; notice the symbolism on the tipi.

Source: Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives

Undoubtedly, the most famous power display was the performance of Tonakɔt, "Turtle," or "Wrinkle Tail"—his power came from Turtle and Underwater Monster—who survived after another man shot him in the mouth with a rifle. Elderly Kiowas still relate this tale. Invulnerability to projectiles has also been reported in Comanche, Cheyenne, Pawnee, Lakota, and Chiricahua Apache cultures.[18] Among the Kiowas, men with power painted the designs on their war shields and tipis (Figure 7.5). Wrinkle Tail's tipi depicts water power symbols: rainbow borders, green top, beavers, and a composite turtle-thunderbird.

Controlling the weather was another feat sometimes achieved by Kiowa medicine men. According to Botadli, "Big Belly," his father, Gibai, had a hailstone as his *gietso* and "understood the rain." Gibai did not pass his *dɔdɔ*, "power," or "magic," to Botadli, allegedly because it created "much mischief," though he gave it to T'aikɔbɔ, his grandson. Once, the mischievous side of Gibai's power occurred when he made it rain on a war party headed by Feathered Lance (Figure 7.6), grandfather to Bert Geikauma, "Crow Lance," who confirmed that he knew of someone who could bring rain. Conversely, Gumdɔ, or

Figure 7.6 Feathered Lance (Kiowa) ca. 1892.

Source: Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives

"Wind" maintained that Kiowas did not pray to make it rain, though he mentioned several individuals, including Gibai and Ayadltsohi (a woman), who could send rain clouds in another direction. Some Kiowa elders today remember their grandparents standing outside tornado shelters with outstretched arms, singing and praying toward incoming tornadic clouds to send them away.

Wiccan magic

Wicca is a **Neo-Pagan** religion, meaning that it is a perceived revival of pre-Christian religious practices (see Chapter 10). Although there is great variation within the Wiccan traditions, magic (sometimes spelled as *magick* to distinguish it as spiritual magic) is often a central element of ritual. Practitioners see their magic knowledge and rituals as a continuation of thousands of years of folk magic, which was often lost or pushed underground by the spread of Christianity. Wiccans also borrow freely from the magic traditions of other cultures around the world.

Wiccan magic rituals usually consist of a stated goal, the manipulation of specific objects, and the observation of special conditions, such as place and time. However, the core of the ritual, what is often considered the "real magic," is the movement of *energy* that takes place within the practitioner. The magician builds up this energy within themselves, and it is released at the right time to bring about the goal of the spell.

Based on the worldview that there is a power that exists in all things, Wiccans use rituals (involving such things as music, dance, visualizations, and the manipulation of objects) to awaken and focus this power to achieve a particular goal, the purpose of the spell. The power can also be moved from one person to another or between humans, places, and objects. As this power moves to its intended target, it will then have an effect on that target.

Popular objects used in Wiccan spells include crystals, herbs, oils, candles, images, runes, and specific foods. Color symbolism is also used, as well as chanting and creative visualization. The religion is closely connected to nature, and the working of magic spells sometimes requires a consideration of the weather, season, lunar phase, and/or time of day. The goal of such magic is often very practical and meant to help with everyday challenges such as relationships, health, protection, money, and employment. Magic is to be used when all else fails and in conjunction with more mundane efforts. For example, the belief is that just doing magic to get a job will not help unless you also take practical measures, such as sending out résumés. Because each individual's personal power is limited, it should not be used lightly.

As we will see in Chapter 10, Wiccan moral rules are such that magic is to be used only for positive purposes. Wiccans often say that they respect life, respect the earth, and respect the power too much to do magic for evil.

Divination

In the previous section, we examined the subject of magic, techniques for directly and automatically bringing about desired results through supernatural mechanisms. People use magic for a variety of purposes, such as bringing rain, curing illness, and ensuring

fertility. Another way of dealing with the uncertainties of life is to anticipate them. As the saying goes, "Knowledge is power." If we only knew what the future holds for us or what is happening at the present time in places and situations that are hidden from us, decision-making would certainly be easier. We could see the consequences of our actions and learn about unknown variables that affect our lives. Techniques for obtaining information about things unknown, including events that will occur in the future, is known as **divination**. The word *divination* comes from the same root as the word *divinity*. This implies that divination has to do with the supernatural.

The nature of many forms of divination is magical. Such magical rituals are used to manipulate the supernatural world in order to provide information. In other words, the ends of a magical ritual can be a physical occurrence, such as the coming of rain, or information, such as who will win a race or competition. Of course, supernatural beings—ancestors, spirits, and gods—also may have access to unknown information. Many divination techniques involve contact with such supernatural entities, as when a medium contacts the spirit of a deceased individual or when a shaman falls into a trance.

Other forms of divination are based on the idea that the world consists of things and events that are interconnected with one another. We saw this same worldview for the workings of magic. Magic is based on the manipulation of perceived connections between things; divination is based on *observing* these connections. For example, many people believe that the movements of the planets, sun, and moon are in some way ultimately connected with a person's life and that an understanding of these movements enables one to learn about the future (e.g., astrology).

Forms of divination

There are many ways of accomplishing an act of divination. To understand these methods better, we can classify various techniques into a number of categories.

A basic characteristic of divination techniques is that some are **inspirational divination,** and others are **noninspirational divination**. Inspirational forms of divination involve some type of spiritual experience, such as direct contact with a supernatural being through an altered state of consciousness, usually possession. Noninspirational forms are more magical ways of doing divination and include the reading of natural events as well as the manipulation of oracular devices. The term **oracle** usually refers to a specific device that is used for divination, and it can be used in inspirational or noninspirational forms. Examples are the poison oracle of the Azande (see further on) and a contemporary toy such as the Magic 8 Ball.

We also can divide divination techniques into *fortuitous* and *deliberate* types. Fortuitous forms happen without any conscious effort on the part of the individual. One sees a flight of birds overhead or unexpectedly falls into a trance and has a vision. Deliberate forms are those that someone sets out to do, such as reading tarot cards or examining the liver of a sacrificed animal.

Using these two ways of classifying divination techniques, we can create four categories: fortuitous noninspirational, deliberate noninspirational, fortuitous inspirational, and deliberate inspirational, as shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 A classification of methods of divination with examples

	Noninspirational	*Inspirational*
Fortuitous	Apantomancy	Necromancy
	Omens	Oneiromancy
	Ornithomancy	Possession Presentiments
Deliberate	Aleuromancy	Prophecy
	Astrology	Medium
	Dowsing	
	Flipping a coin	
	Graphology	
	Haruspication	
	Magic 8 Ball	
	Ordeals	
	Ouija board	
	Palmistry	
	Phrenology	
	Scapulamancy	
	Tarot cards	
	Tasseography	

A survey of divination techniques

There is a wide variety of divination methods, many of which reflect the physical environments, concerns, and occupations of the people who practice them. Divination techniques are a form of cultural adaptation to the unknown and sometimes unknowable. What follows are a number of these techniques.

Noninspirational forms of divination

Body actions include such things as sneezing, twitching, and hiccupping. Such activities can be interpreted in many ways, and interpretations of the same action differ from culture to culture. Some common examples of noninspirational divination found in the United States are: If you sneeze before breakfast, you will receive a letter that day. If you sneeze six times, you will go on a journey. If you hiccup or your ears are burning, someone is talking about you.

Knowledge can also be derived from the observation of living or dead animals. This includes **omens**, fortuitous happenings, or conditions that provide information. There are a large number of examples as well as a very extensive vocabulary that describes them. What follows are only a few.

Across cultures, individuals and groups gain information from nonhuman agents, such as the movement of stars, finding patterns in the flames of a fire, lightning, thunder, and other natural phenomena like the observed behavior of animals. **Ornithomancy** involves reading the path and form of a flight of birds, and **apantomancy** refers to a chance meeting with an animal, such as a black cat crossing one's path. (Many cultures attribute good and

bad fortune to chance meetings with various animals. Among the Nandis of East Africa, if a rat crosses one's path, that is good, but if it is a snake, that is bad.)

An animal does not have to be alive to be used for divination; it is sometimes a sacrificed animal or part of an animal that is examined for answers to questions. **Haruspication**, the examination of the entrails of sacrificed animals, was part of the ceremonies opening a session of the Senate in ancient Rome. In another technique, a scapula or shoulder blade from an animal skeleton, such as a sheep or even from a human, is dried, and a question is written on the bone. The scapula is then placed in a fire, and the pattern of burns and cracks is read by a specialist to determine the response. This is called **scapulamancy**.

Many physical entities of the natural world can be "read" for information. **Astrology** is based on the belief that stars and planets, as well as the sun and moon, influence the destiny of people. Other techniques observe the winds and the movement of water. Infrequent appearances of natural events, such as earthquakes and comets, might even portend evil events.

There are many other forms of divination that you may find familiar. These include **aleuromancy**, the use of flour (as in fortune cookies); **dowsing**, in which a forked stick is used to locate water underground; **graphology**, handwriting analysis; **palmistry**, the reading of the lines of the palm of the hand; **phrenology**, the study of the shape and structure of the head; and **tasseography**, the reading of tea leaves. Some familiar forms of divination are mechanical types that include the manipulation of objects (see Box 7.2). A good example is flipping a coin. Other well-known forms of mechanical divination in Western societies include the Ouija board, Magic 8 Ball, and tarot cards. Mechanical devices are also used in other societies. For example, in many divination systems, a series of objects, such as shells and bones, are thrown, and the pattern formed by these objects is read (Figure 7.7).

Box 7.2 *I Ching: The Book of Changes*

The *I Ching*, or *The Book of Changes*, is a Chinese divination text that is thousands of years old. The methods described provide much more than just yes/no answers and are seen not so much as foretelling the future but rather as revealing what the person needs to do to live in harmony with the forces of the universe that control the future.

In the *I Ching, yang* (a male element associated with warmth, light, hardness, and the heavens) is represented by a single line (—) and *yin* (a female element associated with coldness, darkness, softness, and the earth) is represented by a broken line (— —). These are believed to be the two interacting forces in the universe (Chapter 2). A set of three lines produces eight patterns or *trigrams*. Each is named and is associated with nature: heaven, earth, fire, water, thunder, wind, mountain, and lake. In addition, each is associated with a number of characteristics. For example, K'un, represented by three broken lines, is the earth and is associated with the color black and an animal (the cow). K'un is gentle, passive, and nurturing. Two sets of trigrams are then put together to form each of the 64 *hexagrams*.

There are many techniques for casting a hexagram. One commonly used method involves the throwing of three coins. The outcomes of six throws identify the six

lines in the hexagram. A more elaborate method of casting the hexagram is to use a set of yarrow stalks.

Each hexagram can be read on several levels. First, each of the six lines, which can be *yin* or *yang*, has meaning. Second, one can examine the pair of trigrams. However, the meanings assigned to each of the 64 hexagrams are the most important.

As examples, here are brief descriptions of three hexagrams. The hexagram that is composed of six solid lines (*yang*) is named Heaven. "This hexagram is a good omen for an important occasion of state, an imperial sacrificial rite." The hexagram named Small Castle is composed of five solid lines and one broken line third from the top. "The image of heavy clouds promising rain that has not yet arrived conveys a mood of expectation and anxiety. There is a sense of impending storm." Finally, the hexagram named Peace consists of three broken lines on top and three solid lines at the bottom. "Some small sacrifices may be called for in order to attain your larger goal. Generally favorable."

Source: K. Huang and R. Huang, *I Ching* (New York: Workman, 1987)

Figure 7.7 Divination. Divination is practiced in South Africa by throwing objects, including pieces of bone, on a mat.

Source: Retained

Inspirational forms of divination

Inspirational divination is a form in which an individual has direct contact with a supernatural being, be it an ancestor, a ghost, a spirit, or a god. This is usually accomplished through an altered state of consciousness.

Presentiments are feelings that a person experiences that suggest that something is about to happen, such as a feeling of dread or an impending disaster. In some societies, a warrior on a raid will return to the camp or village after feeling a presentiment that is thought to be an omen of his impending death on the raid. The warrior will be thought of not as a coward but as a prudent individual.

The term **necromancy** is used in various ways. Generally, it refers to divination through contact with the dead or ancestors. In ancient Greek society, when a person died under suspicious circumstances, the body was brought into the temple for close examination. It was believed that signs on the body were attempts of the spirit of the dead to communicate what happened and who did it. In most cases, a diviner then enters a trance in an attempt to communicate with the dead.

Possession can be either fortuitous or deliberate. **Prophecy** is fortuitous in that the prophet receives information unexpectedly through a vision without any necessary overt action on the part of the individual.

A familiar example of prophecy is Moses. The book of Exodus tells that Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock and one day led them to the edge of the desert. An angel of God appeared to Moses from within a burning bush. God told Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but Moses did not want to go at first. He replied, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" God replied, "I will be with thee" (Exodus 3:11, 12).

Box 7.3 Spiritualism and séances

In the Spiritualism religion, it is believed that the dead continue to evolve in the spirit world and can communicate with the living to share their wisdom. This is done through séances in which individuals gather together and, with the help of a spirit medium, attempt to get messages from the spirit world.

Mediums enter into an altered state of consciousness and communicate with the supernatural in a variety of ways. This may be *mental*, as when one senses the presence of the spirits, or *physical*, as when the spirit manipulates energy to make a knocking sound or ring a bell. Mediums also frequently use a variety of divination techniques, such as tarot cards, crystal balls, and Ouija boards. The medium may also become possessed by the spirit, who then speaks through them, a phenomenon called **channeling**.

Spiritualism was very popular in the mid-nineteenth century. Mary Todd Lincoln held séances in the White House in 1862 after the death of her 11-year-old son from

a fever. In 1891, the Ouija Board was patented to help make communication with the dead more efficient. However, widespread fraud led to the loss of credibility for the movement, and its influence declined. In the 1920s, for example, Harry Houdini spent much time debunking spirit mediums by showing that many used the same techniques as stage magicians. Before he died, Houdini and his wife agreed that, if possible, he would communicate a secret code to her from the afterlife. For ten years after his death, she held yearly séances on Halloween to attempt to contact him, but she never detected contact.

Deliberate possession involves an overt action whereby a **medium** falls into a trance. Communication from the deities through possession, usually of a priest, is a very common feature of many religious systems. One example is the Oracle at Delphi (see further on).

The interpretation of dreams is another common form of divination across cultures. Dreams are often thought of as visits from spirits or visions of journeys taken by one's soul during sleep.[19] Either way, an individual establishes a connection with the supernatural world and then interprets what they experience in a dream. Much of the dream experience is symbolic, which can make dreams difficult to interpret across individuals. While sometimes the interpretation is more obvious, at other times, it requires a specialist. The interpretation of dreams is termed **oneiromancy**.

Some scholars see two basic categories of dreams. One is the *individual* dream, the type familiar to us, the kind that comes from inside the dreamer. In some societies, however, the source of the dream may lie outside of the dreamer. These are the *culturally-patterned* dreams that often are deliberately sought—in a coming-of-age ritual, for example. Sometimes, the individual simply waits for the appropriate, culturally demanded dream to occur, often encouraged by a shaman or parent.

Whatever the source of the dreams, they often serve as a source of information, which classifies them as a divination method. An ancestor might appear in a dream and prescribe to the dreamer a cure for illness or a warning of what is to come. Guardian spirits and totemic spirits may let themselves be known through dreams, and a spirit may appear in a dream informing the individual what his lot in life is, such as a call to a career as a shaman or priest. A dream may also be a visit from the soul of a recently deceased relative informing the dreamer of a particular desire of the soul. Failure to meet this desire might result in illness and perhaps death.

Ordeals

Ordeals are painful and often life-threatening tests that a person who is suspected of guilt may be forced to undergo, such as dipping a hand into hot oil, swallowing poison, or having a red-hot knife blade pressed against some part of the body. Ordeals can be thought of as a *trial by divination* performed on the body of the accused. In some cultures, including past European and American cultures, ordeals were an important part of criminal trials.

Among the Kpelles of Liberia, trials are conducted through the use of the hot knife ordeal. The ordeal is conducted by a specialist who is licensed by the government. The specialist will heat a knife in a fire and first pass the knife over his own body to show that the ordeal is valid because he himself is not burned. Then, the knife is stroked over the body of the accused. If the individual is burned, he is guilty.

A European trial conducted between the ninth and thirteenth centuries could include an ordeal, especially when other kinds of evidence were inconclusive. There were essentially two types of ordeals. The first involved the handling of a hot object by the accused, usually a piece of metal or stone removed from a cauldron of boiling water, or carrying a piece of red-hot metal removed from a fire by the bare hand and carried nine paces. Three days following the handling of the hot object, the hand of the accused would be examined for signs of burns that would signify guilt. The other type of ordeal involves tying up and throwing the accused into a lake or river. Water, being pure, would reject the guilty who would float to the surface. Water, however, would accept the innocent, who would sink.

In actuality, though, these ordeals were seldom performed. Many people, though, believed in the efficacy of these trials, especially when they were carried out by a priest in the context of a church-sanctioned activity. Faced with an ordeal, the guilty usually confessed before it could be carried out. More often than not, the truly innocent were glad to participate in the ordeal. It has been suggested that if the priest in charge of the process was convinced of their innocence after spending time with the accused to prepare them for the ordeal, he would see to it that the hot water was not as hot as it could be so that the innocent were able to survive the process.

Astrology

Quite likely, the most popular divination technique practiced in the United States today is *astrology*, which actually has a history stretching back thousands of years. The basis of astrology is the assumption of a causal relationship between celestial and terrestrial phenomena and the influence of stars and planets on human lives. Astrology can be used to examine the life of a specific individual or to divine events of importance to the whole community.

The origins of astrology in the Old World appear to have been in Babylonia, where it was the most common form of divination. However, it was not conducted on an individual basis but rather for the well-being of the entire community. The casting of horoscopes did not occur until the fifth century BCE, rather late in the history of Babylonian astrology. Other important innovations included dividing the ecliptic of the sun's orbit around the earth into 12 zones of 30 degrees each.

Crucial to Babylonian astrology was the idea that the movements of the celestial bodies represented the will of the gods. Therefore, by reading the signs in the heavens, the future could be divined. The sky was seen as containing the "mansions" of the three principal gods: Anu, Enlil, and Ea. These gods governed the "celestial paths" or three belts that ran along the equator, the Tropic of Cancer, and the Tropic of Capricorn. Each of the planets was also identified with a specific deity. For example, the planet Jupiter was associated with Marduk, and Venus was associated with the goddess Ishtar. Ultimately, a god was

linked to and was seen to rule over each month. These were closely linked with the activities of the agricultural cycle.

From Babylonia, astrology spread to Greece, Rome, and Egypt, where it was developed far beyond what the Babylonians had achieved. Hipparchus is credited with discovering the position of the equinoxes around 130 BCE, thus laying the foundation for the horoscope as we now know it. One of the most significant contributions to astrology on the part of the Greeks is this attempt to chart an individual's destiny by looking at the position of the stars and planets. From the Greeks, we also get the fully developed *zodiac*. Each of the 12 zones was linked to a particular animal (e.g., Saturn with a goat, Mars with a ram, Venus with a bull). From Greece, astrology spread to India, Iran, and throughout much of Asia.

In Europe, Greek astrological knowledge was revived only with the translation of Arabic texts in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There was a large renewal of interest in the subject in Western Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Up until the rise of modern science in the sixteenth century, astrology and astronomy were intertwined. With the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler, astrology lost its scientific basis and became separate from astronomy.

In the United States today, even people who do not believe in astrology's divinatory abilities generally still know what their sign is and at least a little of what is associated with that sign. Reading "daily horoscopes" continues to be a common practice for many people.

Maya astronomy and astrology

Classic Period Mayas (250–900 CE) were master astronomers who believed that celestial deities influenced human activities. Important to the Mayas was the coincidence of historical dates and synodic planetary events. A *synodic cycle* is described as the "interval between successive configurations of a body relative to the sun."[20] Thus, a synodic lunar month equals 29.5 days. Maya scribes recorded planetary events through carved inscriptions on monuments, or else the events were predicted in *codices*, books made from deerskin, or fig bark. The codices, whose screenfold pages attached to one another like an accordion, contained private and esoteric knowledge used by high-status priests.

During the Spanish Inquisition in the Yucatán, Bishop Diego de Landa burned at least 27 hieroglyphic books in July 1562. Today, there are only four extant Maya codices: *Grolier Codex, Paris Codex, Madrid Codex,* and *Dresden Codex*. Of the four, the *Dresden Codex* is the best known. Created in the Yucatan Peninsula in the twelfth or thirteenth century, this 74-page screen fold book is highly ornate in red, yellow, and blue ink images painted on plaster-coated pages (Figure 7.8). It is believed that Hernán Cortés originally obtained the codex, brought it to Spain, where it was eventually purchased by a Viennese collector, and then sold to the Dresden Library, where it was first studied by Ernst Förstemann in 1880. After World War II, Yuri Knorosov and Tatiana Proskouriakoff resumed researching the *Dresden Codex*. Collectively, they were among the first decipherers of the written Maya language.

The *Dresden Codex* combines astrology with astronomy and was used similarly to our *Farmer's Almanac*. Based on the 260-day Tzolkin calendar, the *Dresden Codex* was used for invocations and divinatory purposes to cast omens or make predictions

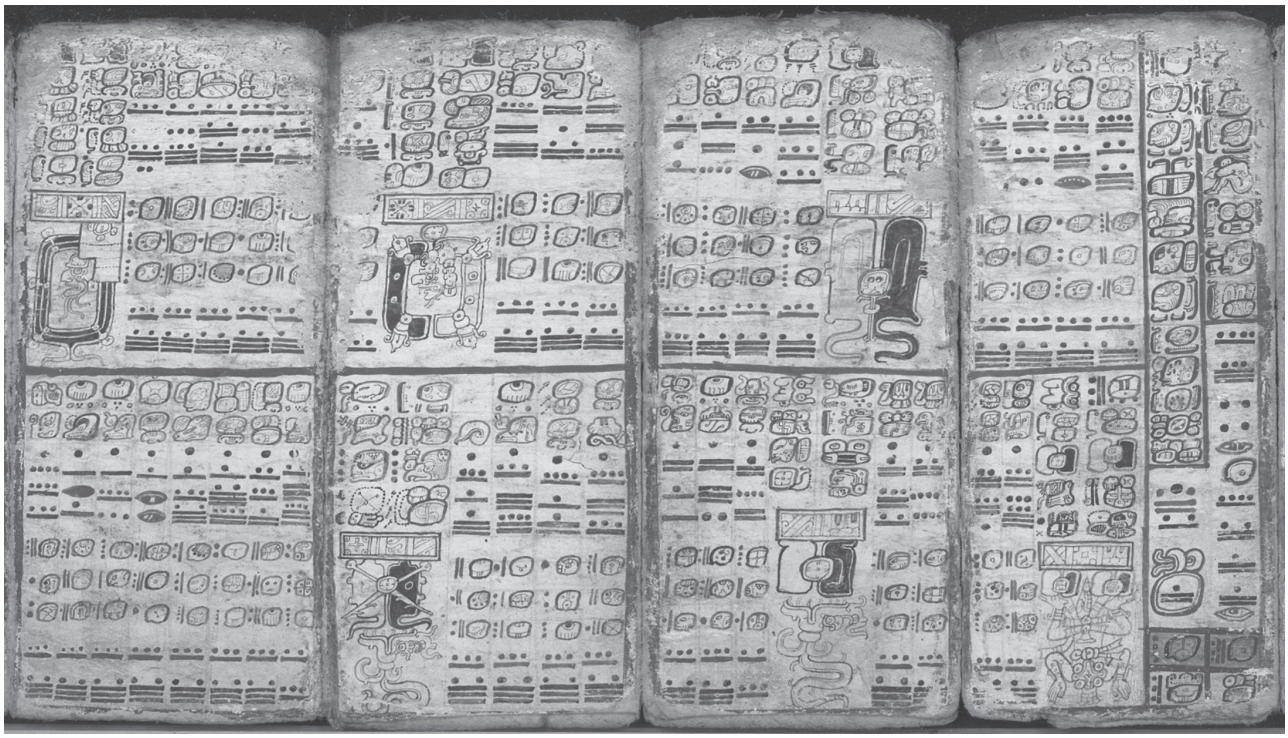

Figure 7.8 *Dresden Codex*; this 74-page screen book is one of the few Maya codices that has been preserved.

Source: Wikimedia

related to the weather, farming, disease and medicine, and celestial and human activities. Pages 51 through 58 depict a lunar eclipse table in groups of five to six moons: six moons equal 177 days. The Mayas predicted that two lunar eclipses occur every 520 days (260 + 260 = 520 days). Lunar tables predicted omens. For instance, at the bottom of page 53, a dead woman is hanging by the hair; a Death God sits in the frame above. Both are bad omens.

The *Dresden Codex* also follows the movements of Venus, which the Mayas call the "Wasp Star," "Great Star," "Red Star," and "Bright Star." Page 24 and pages 46 through 50 are Venus tables that predict warnings for certain aspects of Venus. Particularly unlucky are the days following the heliacal rising of Venus after inferior conjunction. (Heliacal rising is the first appearance of a star after its invisibility due to conjunction or close position with the Sun.) The Mayas believed that the bright rays of Venus rising as Morning Star were atmospheric arrows bringing death and destruction.

Oracles of the Azandes

Zande oracles have been described in great detail by anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard. The best known are *iwa*, the rubbing-board oracle; *dakpa*, the termite oracle; and *benge*, the poison oracle.

The oracle that is most often used is *iwa* or the rubbing-board oracle. This is a relatively easy-to-use oracle that can be consulted very quickly if an answer is urgently needed—sudden onset of an illness, decisions about going on a journey, questions about interpersonal relationships, and a myriad of minor questions. Many older men carry *iwa* on their persons, ready to consult it at a moment's notice. If a man has not acquired or learned to use the oracle, it is quite easy to find a friend or relative who has.

The rubbing-board oracle takes many shapes but is relatively small, made of wood, and has a flat, round, or oval "female" surface and a "male" piece or lid that fits on top. After being carved, the object becomes an oracle only after it has been rubbed with medicines and buried in the ground for a few days to permit the medicines to work. The female surface is treated with plant juices, and the male lid is moistened with water. As the lid is moved back and forth, it will either move smoothly or stick to the female surface. The sticking is usually interpreted as a *yes* answer; moving smoothly is interpreted as a *no* answer.

Iwa is a human artifact and, therefore, is thought to be prone to error. Although it is sometimes inaccurate, this fact is balanced against the ease of use and how easily questions can be asked of the oracle within a short period of time. It often serves as the first step in the process that leads to the use of more reliable, albeit more expensive and complex, oracles.

A greater level of reliability is given by *dakpa*, the termite oracle. Just about any man, and sometimes a woman, can consult *dakpa*. All one has to do is find a termite mound and place two branches from two different trees into the mound. The next day, one removes the two branches to see which one (or both) has been eaten by the termites. Of course, the process is slow—one has to wait overnight—and because only a few questions can be asked at any one time, its use is quite limited. However, it is considered to be reliable, primarily because it is not manufactured by humans. Here, the agents of the oracle are termites not influenced in the same way as people.

Without question, the most important Zande oracle is *benge*. When it is consulted or sanctioned by a chief, the results may be used as evidence. It is used in all important legal proceedings and social situations and directs the Azandes on what to do in major crisis situations.

The poison used is a red powder manufactured from a forest creeper mixed with water to make a paste. The liquid is squeezed out of the paste into the beaks of small chickens, which are compelled to swallow it. Generally, violent spasms follow. The doses sometimes prove fatal, but just as often, the chickens recover, and sometimes, they are even completely unaffected by the poison. From the behavior of the chickens, especially by their death or survival, Azande diviners receive answers to the questions they place before the oracle.

The forest creeper, though, does not grow in Zandeland. It takes a long, difficult journey through the territory of other tribes to procure the poison. This, in part, accounts for the high value the Azandes place on the poison oracle. The oracular consultation also takes place away from the homesteads where the oracle can be consulted in secrecy without interference from witches. The equipment includes the poison and a basket of chickens. The Azandes raise chickens but do not regularly slaughter them for food except on very special occasions. Eggs are not consumed but are permitted to hatch.

It takes experience and skill to become a good operator of the *benge* oracle, to judge the amount of poison to be given to the chickens, and to observe and interpret their

behavior. At the start of a consultation, the *operator*, who has observed a number of tabus, prepares the poison. A second man will pose the questions. The operator then twirls a grass brush in the liquid poison and squeezes the brush so that the poison runs into the throat of the chicken. The questioner begins to address the poison over several minutes, and more poison is given to the chicken. Then, the operator takes the chicken in his hand, jerks it back and forth, and finally places it on the ground. The operator and questioner watch as the animal dies or survives. Depending on how the question was phrased and the instructions given to the poison, the death or survival of the chicken provides a yes/no answer to the question. We will discuss *benge* in relation to Zande witchcraft in Chapter 10 because the poison oracle is the principal method of determining the identity of a witch.

Divination in ancient Greece: the oracle at Delphi

Many divination techniques were popular in ancient Greece, including oneiromancy (interpretation of dreams), ornithomancy (reading the flight of birds), haruspication (examining the entrails of dead animals), cleromancy (casting lots), and the consultation of professional mediums, such as those at Siwah, Didyma, Dodona, and Delphi.

The Temple of Apollo at Delphi was the most important religious site in ancient Greece. The site dates back to 1400 BCE and was built around a sacred spring. The Greeks considered Delphi to be the center (literally the navel) of the world. The oracle at Delphi was consulted for many matters, large and small, by people from all over Greece and beyond. Battles to be fought, voyages to be undertaken, and investments to be made were all brought before the oracle, whose answers were often cryptic. It was the oracle at Delphi that warned Oedipus in myth that he would kill his father and marry his mother.

The oracle spoke the word of the god Apollo through the Pythia, a woman who would enter an altered state of consciousness and become possessed by Apollo. Many ancient accounts exist that describe how this divination took place. A person wishing to consult the oracle would first sacrifice an animal and observe whether or not it was a good day to consult the oracle. If the omens were good, the petitioner would wait outside the Adyton, the inner chamber only entered by the Pythia.

Prior to actual consultation with the god Apollo, the Pythia would cleanse herself in the spring, drink water from the sacred spring, and chew on a laurel leaf (a symbol of Apollo). She would seat herself on a tripod that was located over a chasm in the earth (Figure 7.9). Inhaling a *pneuma*, or sweet-smelling gas, which came from the chasm, she would enter into an altered state of consciousness. Questions, written on lead tablets, were passed to the Pythia, and she would answer. A priest or poet located nearby would then interpret what she had said and record it in verse.

Scholars disagree on how coherent or lucid the Pythia's speech was and how much interpreting was done by the priest. Regardless, her answers, in the way of oracles, were not direct. They were often ambiguous, filled with double meanings, or plainly misleading. For example, the story is told of King Croesus of Lydia, who asked the Pythia if he should make war on the Persians. She answered that if he did, he would destroy a great realm. Croesus went to war, not realizing that the realm he would destroy would be his own.

Figure 7.9 Painting of the Pythia. Painting on a drinking cup, ca. 440–430 BCE. Aegeus, the mythical king of Athens, consults the Pythia, who sits on a tripod. This is the only contemporary image of the Pythia.

Source: Retained

Although descriptions from Plutarch and others described the Pythia breathing in gases from the chasm, attempts in the early 1900s to find an actual source of these gases failed. For many years the idea that such a thing had actually taken place was dismissed. Then, in the 1980s, a United Nations Development Project began a survey of active faults in Greece. At that time, a geologist, Jelle de Boer, found signs that indicated a fault line running along the south slope of Mount Parnassus and under the site of the oracle.[21] Gases and spring water could have reached the surface through cracks created by the fault in the ground below the temple. De Boer began working with an interdisciplinary team, including an archaeologist, a chemist, and a toxicologist. This team has suggested that inhaling the gas ethylene could account for the various descriptions of the effects on the Pythia of inhaling the *pneuma* at Delphi.

Magical behavior and the human mind

Magic and divination exist because of how the human brain considers cause and effect. An action—perhaps the recitation of a spell—is followed by a result. For example, a ritual designed to bring rain performed in the morning may be followed by a rainstorm that afternoon. There are two possible explanations: one is that the ritual caused it to rain; the other is that the appearance of a rainstorm that afternoon was simply a coincidence. It appears that the default setting of the human brain is to think of a temporal sequence—ritual followed by rain—in terms of cause and effect rather than coincidence. In fact, the brain has a very difficult time thinking in terms of coincidence at all. This view of cause and effect is what we mean by magic. We can define magic as methods (rituals) that somehow interface with the supernatural by which people attempt to bring about particular outcomes.

Not all magic is directed or purposeful. It is possible to set something in motion without being aware of it, without deliberately performing a ritual. For example, if you break a mirror, you set in motion events that will result in bad luck. This is why many people are careful not to step on a crack in the sidewalk and not to let a black cat cross their paths. You have not offended a deity who is extracting punishment. You have unwittingly pressed the wrong button, and the result—bad luck—will automatically happen.

Magical thinking

This perceived relationship between doing something and what appears to be a result of that action is the common basis of a lot of human behavior across cultures. I find a coin on the sidewalk that I place in my pocket. The next day something good happens—I unexpectedly receive a raise. Attributing this to the good luck I got from picking up the coin is an example of *magical thinking*.

Simple examples of magical thinking can be found in behaviors that are frequently referred to as **superstitions**. Superstitions are relatively simple forms of magical thinking. They represent simple behaviors that directly bring about a simple result, such as carrying a good luck charm. While the term *superstition* is frequently used to describe such magical behaviors, the term is highly problematic. A superstition is frequently thought of as being silly and the hallmark of an uncritical mind. This is better referred to as magical thinking.

Magical behaviors frequently arise in situations that are difficult to control and in which negative outcomes are frequent. Examples abound in gambling behaviors such as a coin toss. If you flip a coin, it will land either heads or tails. The odds of either of these occurring are 50:50. The odds of winning at any number of games in which no skill is involved can be easily described mathematically, whether it is a flip of a coin, the throw of a pair of dice, or the dealing of a hand of cards. And yet gamblers worldwide sincerely believe that the behavior of coins, dice, and cards is not random but can be influenced by outside forces. Thus, a gambler will wear a lucky shirt, carry a good luck charm, blow on the dice before throwing, or any number of magical behaviors.

A similar connection between magic and uncertainty can be found in athletics. Of course, skill and practice play a major role in athletic prowess, but poor athletes sometimes do exceptionally well, whereas great athletes will hit a patch of "bad luck." Because much is riding on performance, athletes frequently attempt to control "luck" through magical behavior.

Anthropologist and former professional baseball player George Gmelch describes magical behavior among athletes:

> On each pitching day for the first three months of a winning season, Dennis Grossini, a pitcher on the Detroit Tiger farm team, arose from bed at exactly 10:00 A.M. At 1:00 P.M. he went to the nearest restaurant for two glasses of iced tea and a tuna fish sandwich. Although the afternoon was free, he changed into the sweatshirt and supporter he wore during his last winning game, and one hour before the game he chewed a wad of Beech-Nut chewing tobacco. After each pitch during the game he touched the letters on his uniform and straightened his cap after each ball. Before the start of each inning he replaced the pitcher's rosin bag next to the spot where it was the inning before. And after every inning in which he gave up a run, he washed his hands.
>
> When asked which part of the ritual was most important, he said, "You can't really tell what's most important so it all becomes important. I'd be afraid to change anything. As long as I'm winning, I do everything the same."[22]

Where do these ritual behaviors come from? They come from what appears to be an association between an activity and a result. The juxtaposition of a behavior with a desired

result—the eating of a tuna sandwich before a game in which the pitcher pitches a perfect game, for example—is seen in terms of one causing the other. From that, the pitcher will religiously eat a tuna sandwich before each game as a method of ensuring success. Gmelch notes that such rituals are found most frequently in those areas that are most difficult to control and are, therefore, most influenced by random fluctuations of success, such as pitching. This behavior among baseball players closely resembles the behavior of a small-scale subsistence farmer attempting to control the problems that beset his crops. Gmelch believes that the personal rituals of professional baseball players are no different from the ones performed by the Trobriand Islanders prior to embarking on high-seas fishing expeditions. Because humans are practitioners of magic, we perform magic rituals to control the uncontrollable events that are full of risk and uncertainty. Trobriand Islanders face risk and uncertainty when sailing, and baseball players face uncertainty in pitching and hitting. (The old adage "good pitching beats good hitting" is true.)

Why magic works

Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor addressed the question of why people believe that magic works. The answer is that magic appears never to fail. There are several reasons for this. First, magic often attempts to bring about events that will occur naturally. Rain magic works because it will eventually rain. Rain magic often is performed at the end of the dry season, when rain is badly needed. Of course, the onset of rains normally follows the end of the dry season. However, the practitioners of such magic do not see it that way. The rain is perceived as occurring as a result of the ritual. The proof is very simple: you perform the ritual, and it rains.

This observation is important in understanding the use of magic and other healing rituals in curing illness. In our society, over 90 percent of all illnesses, including colds and fevers, will eventually disappear, with or without treatment. Therefore, in the vast majority of illnesses, a cure will naturally follow the ritual. Again, we have to assess the juxtaposition of the ritual and the end of the illness—a case of cause and effect.

People do not generally ask impossible things of magic. Magic to bring rain at the end of the dry season or to make a garden grow is likely to work. Magic to enable a student to pass an exam without studying or be able to fly off the roof of a building is likely to fail. No one tries to grow his or her garden by magic alone. There is a natural world that demands a natural response (you must weed and water your garden), and there is a supernatural world that demands a supernatural response (you must make sure no supernatural harm comes to your garden and try to gain supernatural help for its success).

Of course, if you do not get the expected results, it could be because you did not do it right; the failure is with the magician, not the magic. In fact, if the belief is that the ritual must be performed without error for it to succeed, failure of the ritual is direct evidence that the magician made an error. Also, someone else could be doing counter-magic; one person's failure is another person's success. Magic might be performed by two opposing entities, and the more powerful will prevail over the weaker. For example, one village might be using magic to kill members of another village, whereas people in the latter village might be performing magic to prevent illness and death. Thus, warfare is being conducted on a supernatural plane.

Finally, there is the issue of *selective memory*. We do not remember everything that happens to us. Some things are etched in our memories; other things are quickly forgotten. Successes, even if infrequent, are remembered and are thought of as proof that something works. Memories of failures, even if common, often quickly fade with time.

There are documented cases of magic working, especially death magic (i.e., magic worked against someone who then dies). These are often referred to as *anti-therapy rituals* (see examples in Chapter 4). Is there a physiological basis for such deaths? This issue is discussed by Harry D. Eastwell among the Australian Aborigines of Arnhem Land.[23] Eastwell notes that the basis of such death by magic is often the result of an extreme state of fear. Such fear gives rise to many symptoms, such as agitation, sleeplessness, and sweating. This is further exacerbated by the belief on the part of the victim and their family that death is inevitable. Thus, as symptoms increase in intensity, the family withdraws support because the patient is seen as socially dead. Because the individual is socially dead, the family will not provide food and water and will often begin funeral rituals before death has occurred.

Conclusion

The human mind sees intention in the nonhuman world and the ability to interact with it directly. This gives rise to the seeming ability to directly influence and, to some degree, control the nonhuman world through ritual activity. This is the basis of magical thinking.

Although magic at first appears to be an exotic topic practiced by those in foreign places, in reality, magical thinking is a very human way of thinking and is practiced at some time or another by every one of us. The logic of magic is not only the result of our normal mental processes but also answers our need to have some control over our lives. Magic gives us control, and divination gives us knowledge—two of the major functions of religion.

Magic deals with supernatural forces and thus is a religious phenomenon. In Chapters 8 and 9, we will turn to what may be a more familiar domain of religion: anthropomorphic supernatural beings.

Summary

Magic refers to activities by which a person compels the supernatural to behave in certain ways. Key components of magical acts are the words that are spoken or the spells and objects that are manipulated in set ways. Magical rituals usually can be performed only at special places and at special times. The performer must often observe certain restrictions, such as abstention from sexual intercourse and avoidance of certain foods.

Sir James G. Frazer articulated the Law of Sympathy, which states that magic depends on the apparent association or agreement between things. There are two parts to the Law of Sympathy. The first is the Law of Similarity, which states that things that are alike are the same. The second is the Law of Contagion, which states that things that were once in contact continue to be connected after the connection is severed. The Law of Similarity gives rise to homeopathic or imitative magic, and the Law of Contagion to contagious magic.

Techniques for obtaining information about things unknown, including future events, is known as *divination*. *Inspirational forms* of divination involve some type of spiritual experience, such as direct contact with a supernatural being through an altered state of

consciousness. *Noninspirational forms* are more magical ways of doing divination and include the reading of natural events as well as the manipulation of oracular devices. Fortuitous forms simply happen without any conscious effort on the part of the individual; deliberate forms are those that someone sets out to do. Examples of divination include omens, presentiments, possession, prophecy, ornithomancy, oneiromancy, necromancy, astrology, dowsing, flipping a coin, ordeals, palmistry, phrenology, and reading tarot cards.

Magic and divination are based on *magical thinking*, or how the human brain perceives cause and effect. This leads to simple magical acts, sometimes called *superstitions*, based on presumed correlations. Tylor addressed the question of why people believe that magic works. The answer is that magic appears never to fail. There are several reasons for this. Because magic always works, failure must be due to the inadequacies of the magician. Magic usually attempts to bring about events that will naturally occur; people do not generally ask impossible things of magic. Finally, there is the issue of selective memory.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 7.

Study questions

1. Towards the end of the movie *Little Big Man* (1968), Old Lodgeskins (played by Chief Dan George) treks up a hill to die. Revived by rain falling on his face, he gets up, shrugs, and then comments, "Sometimes the magic works, sometimes it doesn't," as he descends. What does he mean? What characteristics of magic are illustrated by his comment?
2. Magic is found across all cultures. Why do you think humans are practitioners of magic? What evolutionary advantages might there be in magical thinking?
3. Review Table 7.1 A Classification of Divination Methods. With which ones are you familiar, either in having been exposed to them, practicing them, or reading about them?
4. Sir James Frazer identified two major types of magic: homeopathic magic and contagious magic. How are they similar, and how are they different? Provide some examples of each type as used in the area of healing.
5. The textbook notes a truism that "magic always works." Is this statement true? Explain.
6. One could argue that the use of divination—astrology, for example—is harmless entertainment. Are there negative consequences of living one's life by utilizing astrology and fortune-telling?

Notes

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6 É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), first published in 1913.
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12 W.D. Hand, "Folk Medical Magic and Symbolism in the West." In *Forms Upon the Frontier*, A. Fife et al., ed., Utah State University Monograph Series 16, no. 2 (1969), pp. 103–118. This belief existed before we learned that walnuts are full of Omega 3s, which are good for brain and heart health.
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18 V. Deloria, Jr., *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), pp. 175–179.
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22 G. Gmelch, "Baseball Magic." *Transaction* 8:39–41, 54, 1971. Courtesy of G. Gmelch.
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Chapter 8

Souls, ghosts, and death

Late-nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward Tylor introduced the concept of *animism*, a belief in spirit beings that animate all living things (see Chapter 1). Although living things can be thought of as having a diffuse supernatural power ("spirit"), they are most frequently expressed as distinct supernatural beings of various kinds living either within animals, plants, and natural physical features—or—living as independent beings. Some are closely associated with humans, even originating as humans, while others may be separate and distinct from humans.

This chapter examines supernatural beings who mirror animate beings, primarily humans, or are transformed human beings. Important among these are souls and ghosts—supernatural manifestations of individuals, living and dead. We conclude with an examination of death rituals that frequently interface with the supernatural entities discussed in this chapter.

Souls and ancestors

The belief in the existence of a spirit entity residing within a person appears to be a natural one that grows out of simple observations about life. A human being consciously acts and interacts with people in certain ways and has a distinct personality. On the other hand, at death, during sleep, or in a faint or coma, action appears to cease. And in dreams and trances, when a person enters an altered state—what happens in these different states?

The term **soul** is used to label the noncorporeal, spiritual component of an individual. Although many people are familiar with the presence of spirits within nonhuman animals, most scholars reserve the term *soul* for the spirits that inhabit the human body. Commonly, across religions, there is a belief that a soul takes on the personality of the individual (or perhaps the individual takes on the personality of the soul). The soul usually has an existence after death, at least for some period of time.

When one dreams, it can appear as if one's soul leaves the body and travels rapidly through space and time, meeting all sorts of people, including relatives who have died. In some groups, it is considered dangerous to wake someone up suddenly, as there might not be enough time for the soul to return from its travels, and the soul might be lost.

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When a shaman enters a trance, it is believed that part of the shaman's soul has left their body to travel to a supernatural world. Similar views are espoused in parapsychology. **Parapsychology** is the study of psychic or *psi* phenomena, which is believed to refer to

> exchanges of information between living things (mainly people, of course), or between living things and the environment, or are influences of living things on the environment, which occur without the use of what we call the "normal" senses, and laws of nature.[1]

Parapsychologists are interested in two major types of psi interactions related to paranormal activity: ESP (extrasensory perception) and PK (psychokinesis). ESP, described as "receptive psi," or "informational psi," involves the transfer of information, usually through telepathy and clairvoyance. PK, called "expressive psi," or "mind over matter," refers to "true mind over matter, or the ability of the mind to influence material objects or process without the use of known physical forces."[2] However, it should be noted that all attempts to demonstrate the existence of psychic phenomena in a controlled, scientific setting have so far failed.

According to anthropologist/parapsychologist Loyd Auerbach, the soul is "tethered" to the body "by a silver cord of some ectoplasmic variety." The phenomenon when part of the mind, soul, or spirit splits off and leaves the body is known as an **out-of-body experience**.[3] Illness may be caused by the soul having left the body, and death is the permanent withdrawal of the soul from the body. The existence of a soul that survives death is reinforced when a loved one feels the presence of the deceased or experiences visits from the deceased in dreams.

Variation in the concept of the soul

Although the concept of a soul can be found in all cultures, the soul is perceived in different forms. The soul may be envisioned as a full-sized duplicate of the living individual, or it may be small and reside somewhere in the body. Depending on the culture, the soul may be found in the liver, chest, heart, or brain. Or the soul may exist as a person's shadow or be reflected in a mirror, which is why beings without souls, such as vampires, are believed to have no reflection. When seeing a photograph for the first time, some people might see the image as the soul captured by the photographer.

Some cultural groups believe there are different kinds of souls that reside within the body. One soul might be responsible for a person's animation and will disappear at death. This soul, or life force, may be reincarnated into other living beings. Another soul might be a spirit that is that individual's personality. Different souls may be associated with different parts of the body, or one soul may come from the father's family and another from the mother's.

For example, in Haitian Vodou (Chapter 12), there are three spiritual components associated with the physical being. One of these is a spirit known as the *mét-tét*, or "Master of the Head." The *mét-tét* may possess the individual and is believed to be responsible for the person's personality. The other two spiritual components can be seen as souls. The *ti-bonanj*, or "little angel," is a person's consciousness and ego. When the body dies, the *ti-bonanj* stays nearby for a while and then moves on to heaven, where it has little more to do with the living. The *gwo-bonanj*, or "big angel," comes from the ancestral spirits and is returned after

death. It is a part of Bondye, the "High God," and is a person's life force that determines, in part, their character and intelligence. If a person has lived a good life, the person's memory will be kept for many generations, and his or her *gwo-bonanj* may be prayed to.

Classic Mayas believed in *way* (pronounced why, pl. *wayob*), companion spirits that were conjured through bloodletting rites. In the Mayan languages, *way* is derivative of the words "to sleep" and "to dream," a reference to the act of transformation into "magical alternative forms such as animals, stars, and fantastic beasts." *Wayob* served as spiritual guides by appearing to individuals in animal form or in dreams to offer guidance or were conjured to bewitch another person.[4] Oftentimes, the *wayob* of royalty were painted on pottery vessels depicted as "prancing skeletons, seated men who rather casually cut off their own heads, fire-snorting peccaries, and odd composites like tapir-jaguars or monkey-deer, along with a supernatural associated with inebriation."[5] Upon death, the *way* left its human body.

In some cultures, you may be born with multiple souls, and other souls may be acquired during your lifetime. The Jívaros of Ecuador (Amazon culture area) believe that people all have three souls. Every person is born with a *nekas*, or the soul that is the life force. The second soul, the *aruntam*, has to be acquired through a vision. Jívaros see this life as false and the spiritual world as real. Only by acquiring an *aruntam* can a person enter into the real, spiritual world. Acquiring this soul is also believed to give a person power, intelligence, and self-confidence. The third soul, the *miusak*, is the "avenging soul." If a person's *aruntam* is killed, the *miusak* will avenge the death. It is this belief that gives rise to the practice of headhunting. The *miusak* is believed to reside in the head; capturing and ritually shrinking the head are believed to neutralize the *miusak* of the enemy.

In some cultures, the soul is believed to be created uniquely for each child. Beliefs differ as to when and how the soul enters into the child. For example, the Roman Catholic belief that the soul enters the child at conception has influenced their position on such issues as cloning and abortion. In other cultures, the soul may have a previous existence before it starts a new life.

Souls, death, and the afterlife

The concept of a soul is very closely tied to ideas about death. As Nigel Barley writes,

> notions of what it means to be dead are always part of a more general idea of what it means to be a living human being in the first place and funerary behaviour and beliefs around the world read like an extended discussion of the notion of the person.[6]

Most cultures believe that the soul survives the death of the body, at least for some period of time. Where there is a belief in multiple souls, the different souls may have different destinations after death, including surviving for different lengths of time. In most cultures, the idea of the soul after death is based more on continuity with life than on immortality, as is common in the West.

Souls that live after death may even spend some time near their family, often until the funeral is completed, and then may travel someplace else or be reincarnated. One of the primary functions of funeral rituals is to aid the soul in its journey. Sometimes, these

journeys are dangerous and difficult, and a soul might perish on the journey or might end up in a not-so-nice place. In some religious systems, the duration of a soul's residence after death is finite, and the soul experiences **transmigration**, rebirth into the body of an animal or another person, such as a relative.

The ability of a soul to survive its journey to the land of the dead may also depend on the quality of the person's life. In such societies, the threat of failing to "pass the test" to enter paradise can act as a means of social control. On the other hand, in other groups, all souls arrive where souls go after death, or, in other cultures, only souls who have particular rituals or elaborate funeral rituals can transition.

Where is the land of the dead, and what is it like? The final destination of the soul is usually some distance from the place where the person lived. It is often located at a known geographic place, such as a mountaintop, island, or a place that is "over the horizon." It may be located in a place not considered a part of the normal physical world, such as in the sky or underground. Nineteenth-century Kiowas buried their dead with the feet facing east and the head west to facilitate the spirit's journey to *komtokya*, or *gomtokya*, "dead people's home," where tipis faced to the west as opposed to the east, because they were confused. Indigenous Chipewyans, caribou hunters of the Subarctic culture area whose homelands bordered the western shores of Hudson Bay, believed that, following death, the soul crosses a river in a stone canoe: a good soul lives on an island in the middle of the river, whereas one that was bad sinks in the canoe.

Although we in the West tend to think of the physical afterlife as a paradise, in many cultures, it is surprisingly similar to the physical community on Earth. In the afterlife, the dead socialize, hunt, and have sex. However, there is no illness, and the dead interact with their ancestors.

Not all souls may go to the same afterlife. Some cultures believe there are special places for souls depending on certain attributes. For example, warriors who have died in battle, women who have died in childbirth, or persons who have died by suicide might go to specific places. Pre-contact Aztecs believed the souls of deceased warriors and sacrificial victims apotheosized as butterflies and hummingbirds and lived in a flower world paradise. There may be special places for the souls of certain social classes or occupational groups, such as shamans. For example, Valhalla was a special place for Viking warriors who died a good death—that is, died in battle. In this case, both social status and manner of death were important.

Examples of concepts of the soul

In this section, we will examine soul beliefs in several societies, including the Yup'iks of Alaska, the Yanomamös of South America, the Hmongs of Southeast Asia, and Roman Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist beliefs. The concept of the soul is highly diverse across cultures and reflects markedly different cultural beliefs and values.

Yup'ik souls

Many religious systems believe in the recycling of souls. Among the Yup'iks of western Alaska, a newborn is believed to have the soul of someone who has recently died in the

grandparental generation. The child will be named after this ancestor. The Yup'iks believe that, at death, the soul remains nearby for a period of time and then leaves to await rebirth.

In Yup'ik culture, animals also possess immortal souls that are part of a cycle of birth and rebirth. However, this cycle is based on a reciprocal relationship between humans and animals, reflecting how each treats the other. For example, if a seal perceives that the hunter is adhering to the rules of Yup'ik society and its relationship to the animal world, the seal will permit itself to be killed. Its flesh will provide food for the hunter and his family, and the seal's soul will, if treated properly by the hunter, return to the sea to be reborn again, continuing to provide nourishment to the hunter.

On death, the soul of the seal is believed to retract to its bladder. Yup'iks collect all of the bladders from the seals killed during the year. They are inflated and hung throughout a five-day festival and then are shoved through a hole in the ice into the water, where the souls are eventually reborn.

Yanomamö spirits and souls

Yanomamös (Tropical Forest culture area) believe in a complex of souls. The main part of the soul becomes a *no borebö* at death. The Yanomamö cosmos is composed of four layers. The living Yanomamös live on the third layer, and on death, the *no borebö* moves up to the second layer, where it travels on a trail until it encounters a spirit named Wadawadariwä. The spirit will ask the soul whether it has been stingy or generous. If the soul replies that it has been stingy, it is sent to a place of fire, but if it has been generous, it joins the ancestors. One would assume that the possibility of being sent to a place of fire would act as a constraint on negative behavior during life, but Wadawadariwä is thought to be somewhat naive and will accept what the soul tells him. As a result, everyone is deemed to be generous and is sent to the village of the ancestors.

Another aspect of the soul is the *bore*, which is released during cremation. It remains on earth and lives in the jungle. Some *bore* possess bright glowing eyes and will attack people who travel through the jungle at night. The third aspect of the soul is the *möamo*, which lies within the body near the liver. Shamans use their powers to remove the *möamo* from the bodies of their enemies, who then become sick and die. Much of the activity of shamans is divided between stealing the souls of enemies and recovering the souls of members of their own community.

In addition, everyone has a *noreshi*, or animal, which is born each time a human child is born and will develop and grow along with the child. The animal is the person's double, and what happens to one will happen to the other. When either the individual or their *noreshi* dies, the other one also dies. The most common *noreshi* for males are large birds, and for females, they are land animals.

A person's *noreshi* lives far away. Therefore, a person has no physical contact with their own *noreshi*. Still, it is possible for someone else living where the *noreshi* lives to kill the *noreshi*, usually by accident, causing the person associated with it to die. If possible, the dead person's relatives will seek vengeance by killing the murderer. When hunters encounter an animal that shows unusual behavior, it is believed to be an evil spirit or someone's *noreshi*. It is never killed.

Hmong souls

Hmongs are a people living in the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia, although large numbers of Hmongs from Laos immigrated to the United States after the end of the Vietnam War. Hmongs believe that a person possesses a number of souls—some sources say as many as 30. Health is the result of a balance between the physical body and its souls. When one or more of the souls are lost or stolen, the person falls ill.

A soul may be frightened out of the body by a traumatic event, or it may be stolen by a spirit. In her book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman tells the story of a Hmong family living in Merced, California.[7] The story centers on a little girl, Lia. One day, Lia's sister came into the house and slammed the door, frightening Lia's soul out of her body. The loss of the soul resulted in an illness, which Hmongs call a phrase that translates as "the spirit catches you and you fall down." The spirit being referred to is a soul-stealing spirit. This illness is diagnosed as epilepsy in Western medicine (etic perspective).

Curing such illnesses falls to the shaman, who enters an altered state of consciousness to search for the soul and, if it is found, will return it to the patient's body. If the soul was stolen by a spirit, the shaman then negotiates with the spirit for the return of the soul. Gifts are offered, and the soul of a sacrificed animal is offered in exchange for the soul of the sick individual.

After the birth of a child, its placenta (afterbirth) is buried under the dirt floor of the house. The word used by Hmongs for the placenta can be translated as "jacket," and it is thought of as a piece of clothing. At death, the soul travels back to where the person's placenta was buried and puts on its placenta jacket. This allows the soul to travel on the dangerous path to the place where the ancestors live. If the soul fails to locate its placenta jacket, it will wander for eternity, never to be reunited with its ancestors.

The soul in Roman Catholicism

The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church states that, after death, the destiny of each soul is determined by God, based primarily on the person's behavior during life. The main issue is the presence of sin, defined as a "moral evil." People who are free of sin and perfectly pure will go to Heaven, where they will be with God and will experience perfect happiness. Although God is considered to be omnipresent, Heaven is considered to be God's home; in general, it is conceived of as being in the sky.

Souls that are in a state of grace but in need of purification go to **Purgatory**. The word *Purgatory* comes from the Latin *purgare*, meaning to make clean or to purify. Purgatory exists for those souls who die with lesser faults for which the person had not repented or for which the penalty was not entirely paid during life. For example, venial sins are considered a consequence of human frailty and are considered pardonable, requiring only temporary punishment. These sins can be dealt with by time served in Purgatory. This is necessary because nothing less than the perfectly pure can enter Heaven.

People who die in mortal sin or with original sin are relegated to eternal punishment in Hell. A mortal sin is an act that is contrary to Divine law and separates the sinner from God; original sin is the sin of Adam in Genesis (disobedience), which is washed away by

baptism. Hell is a place of punishment and eternal torment for the damned, including both humans and demons, and it is usually conceived of as being within the earth. In the Bible, it is described as an abyss and a place to which the wicked descend. Because its inhabitants are estranged from God, they are placed as far away from God as possible.

The soul in Hinduism and Buddhism

Hinduism holds a belief in an immortal, eternal soul that is born again and again in a series of different bodies, a process called **reincarnation**. Although the bodies differ each time, the self—its distinct personality—remains unchanged. Rebirth as a human is seen as a precious and rare opportunity.

The Hindu idea of reincarnation is closely tied to the concept of **karma**. Karma concerns an individual's actions and the consequences of those actions. One's life is what one has made of it, and every action, thought, and desire—good or bad—will affect one's next life. The life one lives now is the consequence of past actions. This cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in this world is known as *samsara*, and the ultimate goal is to escape samsara and achieve *moksha*, or liberation from the limitations of space, time, and matter. Because the achievement of salvation is difficult and complex, an individual will require multiple lifetimes to achieve it. Although there is no mobility within a single lifetime, how the individual accepts and lives during that life will determine the level for the next reincarnation.

Buddhist concepts of the soul, reincarnation, and karma differ in important ways. Buddhists do not believe in an immortal soul or a conscious personality that continues on. What is referred to as a soul, Buddhism conceives of as a combination of five mental and physical aggregates: the physical body, feelings, understandings, will, and consciousness. These make up the human personality, which is caught up in the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

The Four Noble Truths state that life is imperfect and inevitably involves suffering that originates in our desires and will cease when desires end. The way to do this and achieve release from the cycle is to follow the Eightfold Path, which consists of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation. A person who does this can achieve Nirvana. The goal of Buddhism is not to go to some blissful heaven but to extinguish desire and craving and escape from the suffering of this life.

Like Hindus, Buddhists also have the concept of *karma*, the belief that all of one's actions, good or bad, help create one's personality. This process continues even after death. Rebirth is seen as the transmission of karma. Buddha compared this process to a flame that passes from one candle to the next. However, it is only the flame of karma that is passed on, not a continuous personality. The Wheel of Life (Figure 8.1) shows the 31 planes of existence conceived of by some Buddhists as psychological metaphors and by others as reality. These planes of existence include hells, hungry ghosts (beings tormented by unsatisfied desires), animals, humans, and gods. Humans proceed around and around this wheel, repeatedly experiencing suffering, unless we are freed into Nirvana. *Nirvana* means to extinguish or put out the flame of the candle.

Ancestors

One possible fate for a soul is that it becomes an **ancestor**, a group of supernatural beings from whom one has descended. Anthropologists in the past often used the term *ancestor worship* to describe the beliefs and behaviors surrounding the veneration of ancestors; however, a number of researchers now think that the ancestors are respected and attended to but not really "worshipped." Regardless of semantics, in patrilineal societies—where descent is traced through the father's kin—ancestors are the "spiritual focus of the group." Importantly, the *lineage* is composed of living and dead members who communicate through sacrifices and other religious rites.[8]

The importance of ancestors in a culture reflects the importance of kinship, generally kinship beyond the immediate family. Even after death, a person remains a valued member of the kinship group, reinforces ideas of social roles, and contributes to social harmony and social solidarity. In some cultures, the ancestors may even act as a moral force, punishing their descendants for misbehavior.

Figure 8.1 The Wheel of Life. A painting of the Wheel of Life on a monastery wall in Tibet.

Source: Getty Images/Time Life Pictures

However, not all souls become ancestors—or at least not ancestors who receive ritual attention. For example, in patrilineal societies where descent is traced through the father's relatives, mainly males become ancestors. If a woman in such a culture were to become an ancestor, this would be determined by her relationship with a man, for example, by marriage or through her children. Although most ritual activity concerning ancestors is a family matter, in Africa, it is common for the ancestors of chiefs or kings to be considered responsible for things that concern the entire community, such as rain, and therefore, they will be recognized by everyone.

Yoruba ancestors

Among the Yorubas of West Africa, ancestors play very important roles in the continued welfare of their descendants, and many religious practices, including the maintenance of shrines and the performance of rituals, are centered on venerating these ancestors.

Yorubas identify two broad classes of ancestors: family ancestors and deified ancestors. Of those who die, only a limited number become family ancestors. Ancestors are individuals who led noteworthy lives while alive, and one of the most important tasks of the family head is to perform proper rituals for the family ancestors. The maintenance of good relations with the ancestors is important for the continued well-being of the family, for the ancestors

Figure 8.2 An *egungun* dancer in Benin; *egungun* dancers announce the arrival of the deceased to the land of the dead.

Source: Alamy

possess the power to bring good or ill to their descendants. *Deified ancestors* are those with great powers worshipped at shrines throughout the region. In fact, such ancestors may be thought of as gods with human origins.

The *egungun* are spirits who have traveled from the land of the dead to visit the living. In ritual re-enactments, the ancestors are often represented by the *egungun* dancers, who serve as conduits between the living and the ancestors. An *egungun* dancer (Figure 8.2), always a male, wears a long grass robe and a wood mask with a human or animal face. Several days after a funeral, the *egungun* goes to the house in which the person has died and informs them that the deceased has arrived in the land of the dead. Food is then given to the *egungun* and his followers.

On death, an individual travels to the land of the dead, and if they have been good in life, they will lead a pleasant existence, but those who behaved badly will suffer. One of the rewards of living a good life is to be remembered. As long as they are remembered, the dead are able to act as intermediaries between the gods and the family. Beyond the annual festival, the ancestors often contact their living family in dreams or through the aid of the *egungun*, who appear when the family needs advice.

Beng ancestors and reincarnation

In some societies, the soul travels to a new home, and in others, it is recycled into another being. When a person dies among the Bengs of West Africa, the soul becomes a spirit that travels to *wrugbe*, one of many invisible spirit villages. After a while, the spirit is reborn as a human baby, although the spirit continues to exist alongside the ancestor—a reincarnated being on earth and, at the same time, an ancestral spirit.

For Bengs, every individual born is a reincarnation of an ancestor. Sometimes, the identity of the ancestor is known: in the case of a child born on the same day a family member dies, the newborn is thought to be an instant reincarnation of the deceased. Knowing which ancestor has been reincarnated in a particular newborn has important consequences because it is believed to determine the personality traits of the child—it is believed they will have the same personality. Often, however, the identity of the ancestor remains unknown.

People are able to travel to *wrugbe* in their dreams to consult with ancestors, but the ancestors also live with the family. At night, a bowl of food is prepared for the ancestors who will sleep there with the living. They return to *wrugbe* during the day.

When a baby is born, the spirit does not move from *wrugbe* to this world all at once but emerges over a period of several years. This emergence does not begin until the umbilical cord falls off. A mixture of herbs is placed on the cord to dry it out to encourage the infant to move from *wrugbe* into the living world. If an infant should die before the cord falls off, there is no funeral or public recognition of the death because the child's spirit has never entered the world of the living.

During early childhood, the child's consciousness is sometimes in this life and sometimes in *wrugbe*. The parents do not want the child's soul to return to *wrugbe*, so they do what they can to make the child's life as attractive as possible. If a child is crying or uncomfortable and inconsolable, the child is thought to be homesick for *wrugbe*. Commonly, a diviner is called. Usually, the diviner suggests that a cowry shell, coin, or other piece of jewelry be given to the child to placate them and show them that they are loved and wanted.

Tana Toraja ancestors and social death

The Tana Torajas are horticultural people living in small villages growing rice and raising water buffalo and pigs in the mountains of Sulawesi, Indonesia. Ritually, their world is divided into the smoke-ascending realm and the smoke-descending realm, a division that exists in both the physical and supernatural worlds. The smoke-ascending realm is associated with the rising sun in the east, the *deata*, and health and fertility rituals. The *deata* are gods and spirits found in mountains, rivers, trees, animals, and the roofs of houses; they also exist in the stars, clouds, rain, and mist. The smoke-descending dominion includes the *nene*, or ancestors, and the *bombo*, or souls of people who have recently died. This realm is associated with the setting sun in the west, death rituals, and the progression of souls. Through ritual, the *bombo* are transformed into *nene*, and the *nene* can be transformed into *deata*.

The smoke-ascending and smoke-descending realms must be kept separate, a requirement that lies at the heart of much of Toraja ritual, which includes the offering of food, such as rice, and the sacrifice of animals. This ritual activity is a way of "feeding the gods," and if it pleases the gods, they will, in turn, aid the people.

Torajas separate physical death from social death clearly. In Toraja society, physical death is associated with the cessation of breathing and heartbeat, but *social death* extends over a period of time—it is a cultural interpretation of death. When a person is physically dead, the individual is not said to have died but is said to have a fever or to be sleeping. This knowledge is important because, at this point, all smoke-ascending rituals are forbidden. To Tana Torajas, the act of dying is a lengthy process whereby the *bombo* (soul) begins to separate from the physical body.

The social pronouncement of death does not take place for weeks and, in the case of very important people, even years. The body is wrapped in a cloth or put in a wood coffin and placed along the south wall of the house with the head to the west—the direction that is associated with smoke-descending rituals. The corpse, which may or may not be partially embalmed, is said to be asleep. During this time, the decaying body is still referred to as a person with a fever. Offerings of food and drink are made to the dead person, and people greet them and converse with them when they enter the house, keeping *the bombo* up to date about the family and community. During this time, the *bombo* of the deceased

is believed to be close by, watching the preparations for its funeral. It will soon have the power to cause trouble or to bring blessings to the family.

Toraja funeral rites are complex. Important smoke-descending rituals that move the *bombo* into the next world, where it is transformed into a *nene* (ancestor), begin with the sound of a gong that formally announces the death. Sacrifices are made, and the body is moved to the west wall with its head pointing south, which is the direction in which it will travel to the afterlife.

The next day, the body is wrapped in cloth, and an **effigy** is made, dressed in the deceased's personal possessions. A few weeks later, the body leaves the house with a water buffalo, household items, and provisions for the soul's journey. The body is moved toward the burial site along with the effigy, usually a frame of bamboo (a kind of grass) or wood. Now, the rituals that will separate the physical corpse from the *bombo* begin. The buffalo is sacrificed, and the corpse is buried in a limestone cliff. If the effigy is carved of wood, it is placed on a ledge in the cliff along with other effigy figures.

The soul has now become an ancestor and begins its journey southward to Puya with the guardian buffalo. (Those who broke the rules of society are not allowed to enter Puya.) The life of a *nene* in Puya is very much like one's life while breathing. The *nene* has the same social rank as in life and is still wealthy or poor. The *nene* keeps an eye on the family to be sure that it is being properly honored, and it has the power to bring aid and blessings as well as harm.

Sometime after the funeral, the descendants perform the rituals to transform the *nene* into a *deata* (god). Whereas the *nene* lives in the smoke-descending realm, the *deata* moves to the smoke-ascending realm. The *deata* then joins the other spirits in the trees, mists, and sky and continues to watch over its descendants, who periodically offer sacrifices.

Bodies and souls

As we have seen, the concept of the soul is intimately connected with death. Although the soul animates the living body, the soul also has a life beyond the physical. In this section, we will look at cases in which the soul and body are disconnected, but one or the other remains closely connected with the world of the living. These include ghosts, vampires, and zombies.

Ghosts

The distinction between a soul and a **ghost** is not always clear. They are both manifestations of an individual after death. A soul is essentially good and might hover around its corpse and family after death, but eventually, it goes somewhere else or is reincarnated. However, souls can bring misfortunate to the family if they are neglected or the family fails to perform the appropriate funeral rituals. By contrast, many perceive a ghost as a negative force that tends to remain in the vicinity of the community intentionally. Cross-culturally, ghosts are often associated with illness and other misfortune.

People may or may not believe in ghosts; however, those who have encountered ghosts do not dispute their existence. From a cross-cultural perspective, most cultures throughout

the world recognize that the dead can appear before the living. In western Germanic languages, *ghost* means "fury, wounding, or tearing in pieces." Conceptions of ghosts also imply souls, good spirits, evil spirits, and, in the New Testament, the spirit of God as the "Holy Ghost."[9] Professor of Comparative Religion Geoffrey Parrinder notes,[10]

> Notions of ghosts and spirits as restless, perhaps unburied or unavenged, beings with a message to convey or a task to fulfill abound in popular belief in many countries, although there may be little formal doctrine or orthodox teachings in the scriptures to support these ideas.

So, what exactly are ghosts? Parapsychologist Loyd Auerbach maintains that ghosts and ghostly activity mostly assume two forms: **apparitions** and **hauntings**. Apparitions refer to ghosts or some part of the human personality, mind, or soul that is believed to exist in our physical universe after the death of its body. They may be seen, heard, smelled, or felt. (Although there are also apparitions of the living—*doppelgangers* or *bilocation*—we will only consider apparitions of the dead.) Apparitions have the ability to "walk or transport themselves through solid objects like walls and doors or appear in midair (levitating their forms off the ground), or of course, appear in various states of clarity, fuzzy-focus one moment, sharp and solid the next." Many who have encountered ghosts report feeling someone's presence or some intelligent force. One theory suggests that apparitions have personalities and telepathically engage in mind-to-mind communication with humans who psychokinetically connect with them. Thus, if some personality or intelligence is associated with an apparition, it is a "true apparition rather than part of the haunting phenomenon."[11]

Hauntings are replays of the past, analogous to a recording locked in time. Hauntings are related to apparitions since ghosts that can be seen, smelled, or heard often appear. In many hauntings, the apparition appears to be an intelligent lifeform. Most important is the fact that a haunting refers to an event that is recorded and played under certain conditions. Auerbach describes a typical haunting: "To create an example, we might visit a 'haunted' house on a few occasions. Under certain conditions, possibly related to the weather or our own moods and emotions, we see a man coming at us with a knife, only to have him vanish just when the knife is coming down. We visit a few times, and experience either exactly the same image, or nothing

Ghosts in Southeast Asia

Beliefs in ghosts are also found throughout South and East Asia. In India, ghosts are those who have met violent or untimely deaths or did not have proper funerals. Ghosts can be good or bad. Accordingly, they may haunt cemeteries or live in trees, appearing in ugly or beautiful forms. In China, ghosts are believed to be the spirits of individuals who died unusual deaths, and in Japan, where beliefs in ancestral spirits exist, neglected ancestors can change into wandering, angry ghosts. "The most dangerous ghosts are those of people who die violently, are murdered, or die in disgrace,"[17] as depicted in *The Grudge*, a spine-tingling horror film.

Figure 8.3 Haunted highway with the ghost of a woman in the streetlight.

Source: Alamy

at all (this is where those conditions come into play). And if we're in a large group, perhaps not everyone sees the image.

Digging into the history of the house, we learn that a previous owner, perhaps many years ago, or perhaps just last year, stabbed someone to death in the very room in which we keep seeing the image. A spiritualistic interpretation might say that 'his ghost is condemned to redo the murder through all time' (a great cliché in many a ghost story). However, given the repeat performance only under certain conditions and only for a few observers, it is more likely that what is seen is merely an image recorded by the house and decoded by the minds of the observers. Some researchers have suggested that the electromagnetic field that surrounds all matter can somehow 'pick up' and 'record' events (like an audio or video recorder), and that our psychic abilities somehow enable us to pick out that information and replay it in our minds, superimposing it on what our eyes really see: a sort of psychically created hallucination. It appears that a large number of reported hauntings revolve around locations where tragedy has struck, where a very emotional event has occurred in the past (Figure 8.3). Many everyday psychic experiences are related to emotion, and perhaps a strong emotion causes a stronger 'image' to be 'recorded'" (Box 8.1).[12]

Box 8.1 A haunting in eastern Oklahoma

Years ago, Karen and her husband moved into an old house outside a small town in eastern Oklahoma. Like many older homes, rooms were added by accretion over time, so they left unpacked boxes in an older room in the back of the house. About a year after moving in, Karen was in the front room of the house late one afternoon when she heard glass breaking in the storage room. Rushing to check, she found nothing out of place and thought nothing of it again until the same thing happened six months later. That evening, she mentioned the strange occurrence to her husband, who said he had heard the same sound about the same time of day. Was this a coincidence? Sometime later, Karen met an elderly man who asked how she liked the house, which she thought was a strange question until she heard his story. In the

early twentieth century, the old part of the house was a mom-and-pop general store. One afternoon, a roadman attempted to rob the proprietor, who quickly wielded a shotgun and blasted the would-be robber into the glass display case, shattering the glass. Since the robbery happened late in the afternoon, Karen and her husband were hearing the replay of this past event. This is an example of a classic or residual haunting event.

Though the old house is gone, a small family business sits on the lot. Some mornings, when the owner arrives, merchandise from the shelves that are ten-feet high is sitting on the floor, unbroken.

Ghosts around the world

A brief cross-cultural survey of ghosts includes the Old Testament, where there are references to ghosts. In Isaiah 8:19, the prophet Isaiah criticized those who consulted mediums in spiritual séances to visit the dead:

> And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead?
>
> (Isaiah 8:19)

I Samuel 28:14 has been interpreted as Saul consulting the Medium of Endor to raise the dead prophet Samuel out of the ground. The reference to a mantle or robe suggests a Casper-like ghost with a sheet over his head.

> And he said unto her, what form is he of? And she said, an old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed himself.
>
> (I Samuel 28:14)

A passage in the Apocrypha, books left out of the Biblical canon but present in the Catholic or deuterocanonical (secondary canon) version of the Bible—states that "lawless men are said to be troubled in their sleep by specters, apparitions, and phantoms" (Wisdom of Solomon 17:14–15). Some older translations of the Bible even refer to death as surrendering the spirit or "giving up the ghost."

New Testament verses also suggest the existence of ghosts. Mark describes how the disciples reacted when they saw Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee: "But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit" (Mark 6:49). Thinking that Jesus was an apparition or ghost, they referred to him as a *phantasma*. Luke's account of the resurrection describes how the disciples feared Jesus, thinking he was a spirit, or *pneuma*, until Jesus assured them that he was of solid form, unlike a ghost.

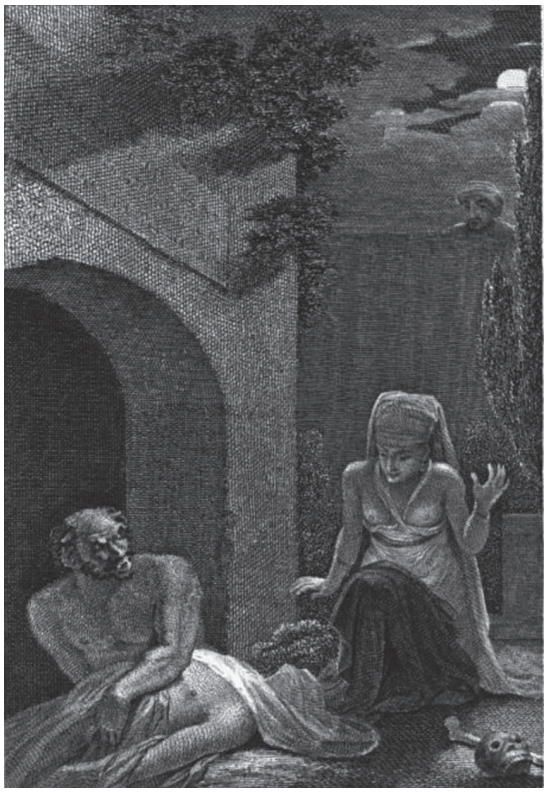

Figure 8.4 The ghoul in the folktale of Sidi-Nouman in *1001 Nights* by Richard Burton.

Source: Wikimedia

Early theologians discussed the presence of angels, good and bad spirits, the resurrection of the dead, Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory during the development of the early Christian doctrine, but "the belief in ghosts and their possible return to earth was left indeterminate, neither accepted nor rejected."[13] To this day, the existence of ghosts and their purposes in our mortal plane of existence is still debated.

Peoples throughout Christian Europe believe in ghosts and haunted places, especially Germanic peoples, who have strong feelings about untimely or unnatural deaths—childbirth, accidents, violence—that create wandering spirits. European and North American folklore abounds with stories of restless spirits.

Ghosts are also recognized in the Islamic world. Muslims believe that after death, "the soul goes to a first judgment and then remains in the grave until the final resurrection." Actual beliefs in ghosts, however, vary. For instance, Moroccans believe that if the dead are offended, they become angry and punish the living, e.g., if children do not visit their parents' gravesite. Tuaregs of the Sahara Desert believe ghosts hang around cemeteries, as do Arabian Bedouins. Arabian peoples, in general, believe in ghouls (from Arabic *ghul*), monsters that "haunt cemeteries and feed on dead bodies" (Figure 8.4).[14] The belief in ghosts is also strong among Egyptians.[15]

In Africa, ghosts may appear to give warnings or to seek vengeance. The Ashantis of Ghana believe that a man who commits suicide becomes a wandering spirit because he cannot find rest and is not allowed into the land of spirits. The Gas of the Ghana coastline believe that those who die violently or prematurely wander as ghosts for 40 days. Angry about their deaths and jealous of other people's pleasures, ghosts follow those indulging in pleasures at night, pestering them until they have a heart attack. One means of protection is to wear white since ghosts hate that color. Among the Ilas of Zambia (central Africa), some spirits are captured by witches and turned into ghost-slaves who cause disease and spirit possession. The ghosts attack people and destroy property.[16]

Ghosts are also commonly recognized in American Indian cultures, though there are cross-cultural differences in how they are perceived. In the Kiowa language, the worst insult is to call someone *khomto*, "ghost," or *zapodle*, "owl." Owls are the souls of the deceased, especially evil shamans, and they are messengers of death. If encountered, they can cause facial "twisting," or paralysis, otherwise known as Bell's palsy. Kiowas fear ghosts, though they participated in the Ghost Dance between 1891 and 1917. Navajos also fear ghosts, but they refuse to accept the Ghost Dance (see Chapter 12).

Siouan-speaking peoples believe that ghosts linger in the areas where they lived before passing to the spirit world. Joseph Marshall III (Lakota) from Rosebud Reservation related that he was driving through the reservation with a friend when they decided to stop and explore an abandoned home formerly occupied by an elderly couple. As they were leaving, Joe said aloud, "I wonder if I should shut the door," because it had been open when they arrived. A voice answered in Lakota, "Please, because it gets cold in here."

During family meals, Lakotas often place a *spirit plate* outside or in the room formerly occupied by a recently deceased family member. This ritual *ghost feed* is performed periodically until it is believed that the ghost has passed to the spirit world, a parallel dimension to our mortal plane of existence. Poncas in north-central Oklahoma still conduct memorial services approximately a year after the passing of a relative. The idea is to convince the ghost to pass to the other side. Once, during a second service held to convince a deceased husband to move on, the exasperated wife blurted out, "Oh Joe, just get the hell out of here!"

Bunyoro ghosts

Bunyoros live in the East Africa Cattle culture area (Figure 8.5), and many of their religious activities center on relationships with ghosts. Ghosts are one of three significant causes of illness, the others being sorcery and the activities of spirits. When illness strikes, a Bunyoro will use the services of a diviner to determine the cause of the illness and the identity of the ghost. Generally, a ghost causes trouble for someone close to it who has offended it in some way and may bring misfortune to that individual's relatives and descendants as well.

Figure 8.5 A traditional Bunyoro house; Bunyoro ghosts appear commonly in dreams.

Source: Wikimedia

The Bunyoro ghost is the disembodied spirit of a person who has died. It is a transformation of the soul left by a deceased person. Unlike ghosts in Western cultures, Bunyoro ghosts are never seen except in dreams. Essentially evil, they are associated with the underworld and with specific places, such as their graves. However, at times, a ghost of a man may come to the aid of his son and descendants.

There are many ways in which a person can deal with ghosts. For example, there are techniques for capturing ghosts to destroy or remove them from the community. Other rituals keep the ghost away from the family. However, some ghosts remain in the community and will periodically possess a victim or a close relative, thereby entering into direct communication with the living. The ghost may even form a relationship with a living person, who will periodically sacrifice a goat to it and build a special ghost hut for it to live in.

The belief in ghosts plays an important role in Bunyoro society. It gives Bunyoros an explanation for things that happen, such as illness, and ritual methods of dealing with these problems. Bunyoros also believe that a ghost will cause trouble if it was treated poorly while living. This belief encourages people to behave properly toward family members.

Today, the popularity of ghost stories and ghost hunting is evident in dozens of television dramas and reality shows. At present, at least 73 web-series and TV shows have appeared over the last 20 years, including *Ghost Hunters*, *Ghost Adventures*, *Ghost Nation*, *Ghost Mine*, *The Dead Files*, *Paranormal Witness*, and *Wrestling with Ghosts*.

The living dead: vampires and zombies

Stories of resurrection from death are in the mythology of many religious traditions. From the Egyptian god Osiris, the Hebrew prophet Elijah, who could raise the dead and is himself expected to return, to Lazarus and Jesus, stories are told of those who die but later return to life. In these examples, because the living person was seen as special, the resurrection has great religious significance. In other cases, the dead returning to life is more ordinary, and it can be positive or negative. In this section, we will look at examples of the latter, namely vampires and zombies. Both are familiar creatures in the United States, where countless books, movies, television shows, and video games feature vampires and zombies as their main characters. However, the folk beliefs that underlie these creatures are often quite different from popular renditions.

Vampires

Much Western vampire lore is based on Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, published in 1897. Stoker based his book loosely on the historical figure of Vlad Tepes, or Vlad the Impaler, but made numerous changes. Tepes was a Romanian prince, not a count, who ruled in Walachia, not Transylvania, and was never viewed as a vampire by the local population. In fact, Tepes is a local hero to many in Romania.

The **vampire** is a creature that was considered to be real throughout much of Europe, primarily in parts of Eastern Europe, and they bear little resemblance to the depictions in these novels. Vampires were more likely to be shabbily dressed peasants than elegant counts and were certainly not seen as romantic in any way. So, who or what is a vampire? A vampire is believed to be someone who had recently died but who has returned to bring death to others.

The interest in vampires and the documentation of cases of vampirism began in the eighteenth century when parts of Serbia and Walachia were turned over to Austria. Austrian patrol officials began recording the local custom of exhuming dead bodies and "killing" them. An important case comes from the Serbian village of Medvegia in the 1730s. The following is a translated report of the case:

> [A] local haiduk [a type of soldier] named Arnold Paole broke his neck in a fall from a hay wagon. This man had, during his lifetime, often revealed that, near Gossowa in Turkish Serbia, he had been troubled by a vampire, wherefore he had eaten from the earth of the vampire's grave and smeared himself with the vampire's blood, in order to

> be free of the vexation he had suffered. In twenty or thirty days after his death some people complained they were being bothered by this same Arnold Paole; and in fact four people were killed by him. In order to end this evil, they dug up this Arnold Paole forty days after his death . . . and they found that he was quite complete and undecayed, and that fresh blood had flowed from his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears; that the shirt, the covering, and the coffin were completely bloody; that the old nails on his hands and feet, along with the skin, had fallen off, and that new ones had grown; and since they saw from this that he was a true vampire, they drove a stake through his heart, according to their custom, whereby he gave an audible groan and bled copiously.[18]

In reality, much of the evidence for the return of Paole and others as vampires can be easily explained by anyone with knowledge of how corpses decompose. For example, as the corpse decays, it becomes bloated with gas. This results in a red coloration of the skin and the appearance of a full abdomen. The gas also pushes blood into the mouth. When the villagers staked Paole and reported that he groaned, what they most likely heard was the release of this gas. Although his corpse appeared not to have decomposed, this also is not unusual. Corpses actually decay at varying rates, and the burial itself delays decomposition. In fact, all decomposing bodies would show these "vampire" features. However, only the bodies of those suspected of vampirism were ever dug up and "killed."

Paul Barber points out that the people who were most likely to be labeled vampires were those considered difficult, unpopular, or great sinners during their lifetime.[19] He suggests that a belief in vampires provided an explanation for unexplained deaths, especially from epidemic diseases and other unfortunate events. Even better than just an explanation, the attribution of misfortune to vampirism also provided a course of action: the vampire could be "killed."

VAMPIRES IN NEW ENGLAND

Vampire beliefs were fairly widespread throughout Europe and came with early settlers to North America. Folklorist Michael Bell, in his book *Food for the Dead,* documented several cases of vampire beliefs in New England, dating from 1793 to as late as the 1890s.[20]

New England vampire beliefs primarily revolved around consumption, an earlier term for tuberculosis.[21] The death of a family member from tuberculosis was frequently followed by further deaths within the family. The disease is readily transmitted among people living under crowded conditions, such as was common in rural New England farms in the nineteenth century. One of the first to die was thought to return to cause illness and death in family members.

One strategy to prevent contagion was to dig up the body of the supposed vampire and destroy it, usually by burning. In 1854, in Connecticut, a man was dying following the death of his father and two older brothers. Friends exhumed the bodies of the deceased brothers and burned the bodies next to their graves. Sometimes, the smoke from the burning was used as medicine. In 1827, in Rhode Island, the remains of a young girl were exhumed, and her body burned while members of the family gathered around and inhaled the smoke to prevent further illness. Drinking a mixture of ashes from the burning and water was sometimes seen as a cure.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF VAMPIRES IN POLAND

An important source of information about the lives of people living in the past is found in the archaeological analysis of cemeteries. Skeletons provide much information about the people and the cultural practices associated with burial. Many burial customs have been interpreted as shielding the community from evil influences associated with the dead. Such practices are referred to as **apotropaic practices**.

Between 2008 and 2012, archaeologists recovered 285 skeletons from a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cemetery located near the village of Drawsko in northwestern Poland.[22] Five skeletons were found with a sickle placed across the throat or abdomen (Figure 8.6). If the body were to rise from the grave, the sickle would apparently decapitate or eviscerate it. Two skeletons had large stones beneath their chins, which were thought to prevent the dead from biting others or feeding on the living. These folk customs are associated with beliefs in vampires.

The six skeletons were not segregated from the other burials. Biochemical analysis confirms that they were not outsiders but members of the community. We do not know why

Figure 8.6 Vampire burial. The skeleton of a 30 to 39-year-old female was buried at Drawsko, Poland, in the seventeenth to eighteenth century. A sickle was placed across the throat of the body at the time of burial, an example of an apotropaic practice.

Source: Retained

these practices were associated with these particular individuals, but it raises questions about their relationship with the living community that remained.

In Poland, a small minority of souls were thought to become transformed into vampires. These would be individuals who were somehow different from the typical members of the community. Perhaps they possessed some unusual physical feature, committed suicide, were unbaptized, or were born out of wedlock. Also, at risk of becoming a vampire was the first person to die in an epidemic, as they were seen as the cause of the epidemic. During the time that the cemetery was in use, there was a series of cholera epidemics in the region. Apotropaic practices were thought to prevent the reanimation of the corpse.

Similar practices have been found in burial sites from as early as the tenth century in many areas, including the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Italy, Slovakia, and Greece. Other customs associated with vampire burials include decapitation, dismemberment, hammering a stake or nails into the body, placing stones on the body, binding limbs, and burning the body.

Haitian zombies

Although **zombies** are known from other cultures, they are most closely associated with Haiti and the Vodou religion (Chapter 12). In contrast to vampires, who are believed to bring death and are therefore feared, Haitian zombies themselves are not to be feared. The fear associated with zombies is the fear of being made into one. Zombies are seen as soulless creatures, animated for a life of slavery on a plantation.

There are a few documented cases that, although controversial, seem to indicate interesting characteristics and possibilities of zombification. These involve people whose death and burial were documented and who were then observed to return. On the basis of these cases, a Haitian psychiatrist named Dr. Lamarque Douyon requested the help of an ethnobotanist, Dr. Wade Davis, then a graduate student at Harvard University, to track down what was considered to be a zombie poison. Dr. Douyon thought that the victim was given a drug that made them appear to be dead. After the burial, the person who had administered the poison would dig up and revive the victim. Davis's account of his research was published in 1985 in the book *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, which was later made into a movie.[23]

Davis claims that he was able to acquire some of the zombie poison and analyze it.[24] The key ingredient turned out to be pieces of dried puffer fish that contain the chemical tetrodotoxin, which in small doses causes tingling of the spine, prickling of the lips and tongue, and euphoria, but in higher doses leads to neurological disruption and damage, including unconsciousness and death. A victim of this kind of poisoning is likely to make a full recovery if he or she survives the first few hours.

Davis pointed out the importance of cultural context and expectations (set and setting). Haitians who practice Vodou believe that it is possible for a powerful priest to control the part of the soul known as *ti-bonaj*, discussed earlier. This soul is associated with a person's personality and individuality. When the person's *ti-bonaj* is captured, the person is deprived of will, and his or her body can be held as a slave. These beliefs are necessary underpinnings of the zombification phenomenon. Davis also suggested that the threat

Zombies as fear projections
Supernatural figures reflect our contemporary fears and anxieties. With zombies, we see both a fear of losing our individuality to become part of the zombie horde and apocalyptic themes based on anxieties about the government and large corporations. Zombies are often said to have been created due to radiation or government or corporate experiments gone awry, such as in the movie and games *Resident Evil* and the classic video game *Wolfenstein 3D*. More recent "zombie" video games include *Left4Dead2, Dying Light*, and *Dead Rising*.

of zombification is used as a social control mechanism. In all, Davis's work is controversial and remains unproven, but it provides an interesting hypothesis.

Zombies in contemporary culture

The U.S. military occupation of Haiti (1915–1934) brought an awareness of Haitian culture and Vodou. By 1932, the first American zombie horror movie, *White Zombie*, had been released, but the movie with the largest impact on portrayals of zombies is George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Romero portrayed zombies not as driven by a Vodou priest to work but instead as driven to eat flesh, starting the popular cultural association of zombies and eating brains.

Dubbed the "Father of the Zombie Film," Romero influenced numerous individuals in the horror genera, including filmmaker John Carpenter and dark comic book writer Robert Kirkman, co-creator of the *Walking Dead* comic book and television series. Launched by AMC network in October 2010, the series follows survivors of a zombie apocalypse who are pitted against zombies and other survivors. Running through November 2022, the *Walking Dead* was nominated for the Golden Globe and other awards and turned into an AMC media franchise, resulting in six spin-off series, webisodes, and video games. The zombie genera remains popular.

Zombies have seen a cultural resurgence in recent years, surpassing even vampires in their popularity. Unlike vampires, who only threaten one individual at a time and have often been cast as romantic figures, zombies appear to menace the entire human race and are portrayed as mindless, shambling, and decaying.

Death rituals

Death rituals or funerals are rites of passage whereby an individual moves from the status of living to dead (or another post-death state such as ancestor). The loss of a member of the community, especially an important member, can be very traumatic. We can think of a death as a disruption of the social fabric of the family and community that needs to be mended. Death rituals provide ways of channeling behavior in what can be a highly emotional state, providing explanations for death and for what happens after death. In these functions, funerals act very much like social rites of intensification (see Chapter 4).

Funeral rituals

Funerals permit and channel expressions of grief. Cross-culturally, all people feel grief, but it can be manifested in different ways. In some societies, there are specific times when it is appropriate to express grief and times when it is not. Other societies, including British and U.S. societies, emphasize control of one's emotions. Grieving is often done privately, not in public, even at the funeral service. The length of time set aside for grieving is often limited, and after a period of time, the close relatives are expected to move on with their lives. Even when grieving is publicly conducted, it is still limited in time, and its expression is culturally channeled.

Among the Murngins of Australia, funeral rituals actually begin before death. The family and community gather around the dying person and begin to wail and sing songs to comfort them. The songs also provide instructions to the soul and request that it not cause difficulties for the family. Although some of the emotional energy of the men is directed toward revenge for the death (death is usually believed to be caused by sorcery or fighting), grief is more explicitly expressed by the women, who take sharp sticks or stone knives and cut their heads so that they bleed.

Through the early twentieth century, mourning Kiowa women cut off fingertips or gashed their arms, legs, and breasts with a knife before keening at the gravesite of a husband or close relative. After several days passed, someone brought her back home. Women in seventeenth-century Delaware society (Northeast culture area) scratched their faces and wailed for long periods.

Across cultures, there are also customs associated with social grief, death, and other forms of loss, where non-relatives are employed or appointed to express heightened public emotion openly on behalf of the family or community. This ceremonial practice is referred to as *ritual wailing*.

In a study of the Shokleng, Bororo, and Shavante tribes of southern and central Brazil (Tropical Forest culture area), anthropologist Greg Urban found common signs of grieving associated with ritual wailing. During ritual wailing, there is a musical line or tone with a rhythmic structure of words and cries or wails. There are also various semiotic forms associated with crying, such as the *cry break*, when individuals force air from the diaphragm in a wail, breathing out sound; voicing while inhaling; the use of a "creaky" voice; and, in some cases, the employment of a falsetto voice. He also found that in ritual wailing, the general expression of grief has no particular or designated audience but is, instead, a group's need to express profound emotion associated with death or separation and loss.[25] The way grief is expressed in ritual wailing is culturally learned, a product of enculturation.

Earlier, we described the funeral rituals of the Torajans of Indonesia. In Tana Toraja, there is a strong cultural pressure not to show one's emotions and to keep sadness and anger hidden from others. Torajans believe such emotions are bad for one's health and are disruptive to interpersonal relationships. However, in the context of death, Torajans can and are expected to express grief.

When the corpse is kept in the house between the time the person physically dies and the beginning of the funeral, wailing does not occur, and the family remains calm. When the funeral finally begins, which might be several months later, there are particular times when it is appropriate to cry and wail. Villagers wail loudly and express both grief and sympathy

for the family of the deceased. Wailing occurs when people are near the body or an effigy figure, and they sometimes cover their faces and touch the body.

Funerals are for both the living and the dead. Frequently, the fate of the soul depends on the proper rituals being performed correctly by the family. Often, the most important issues are to protect the living by separating the living from the dead and to move the soul away from the living community so that it cannot cause harm. There are many ways in which the living and dead are separated. Often, the personal property of the deceased is destroyed. This eliminates anything that might attract the soul and encourage it to stay. Nuers, a pastoralist group in East Africa, quickly bury the body and obliterate the grave so that the soul cannot find its body, thereby willing it to leave. Other ways of moving the soul are to frighten it with firecrackers, as was done in China, or to build some type of barrier that ghosts will not cross.

The need to protect the community from ghosts is made very explicit in the funeral rituals of the Danis of New Guinea. Karl Heider describes a Dani funeral: "

> In every way, explicit as well as implicit, the funeral acts shout out to the ghosts: "See this! See what we do for you!" And then, although this part is not so often said in words: "Now go away and leave us in peace!"[26]

Disposal of the body

The focal point of most funeral rituals is the *corpse*, and one of the most important activities in a funeral is the process of disposing of it. In some cultures, it is truly a disposal, for it is thought that as long as the body is intact, the soul will not leave. In other cultures, burial may take place quickly, often within 24 hours, or the body may be kept for several days or longer before burial. This is especially true if some type of preservation is practiced and the body plays an integral part in the ritual.

Burial

Perhaps the most common means of disposing of a body is *burial*. In order to analyze burials, there are many variables involved, such as where the body is buried. Often, there is a sacred place for burials, such as a cemetery or cave, and they are sometimes restricted to a particular ethnic group, social class, or people associated with a specific occupation or cause of death. Many nation-state societies provide special cemeteries for members of the military, for example, or for those who died in a specific war, such as World War II cemeteries. Some cemeteries contain unmarked graves, and others, very elaborate tombs.

However, bodies are not always placed in special places. Some are buried near the house or even under the floor of the house, as practiced by the ancient Mayas. Frequently, this occurs when the soul becomes an ancestor, and the family wishes to keep the ancestor close by.

The body can be simply wrapped in a blanket or cloth, sometimes made with special designs or prepared earlier in life for just this occasion. The body can be placed in a wood coffin of various shapes and designs or a pottery vessel. The position of the body may be influenced by the size and shape of the container. A body can be stretched out in a coffin (most frequently on its back but sometimes on its side or stomach) but would be bound in a flexed or fetal position if placed in a pottery vessel. Sometimes, the body is oriented in a particular direction, with the head often positioned in the direction of a sacred place.

Often, the body is prepared in some way before being placed in a container or in the ground. The body may be decorated, clad in special clothing, or painted. *Grave goods*, including sacrificed animals and even other people, may be buried with the body, as well as simple mementos or elaborate artifacts.

THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

Much of our knowledge of history comes from written documents. However, written records document only certain segments of society, usually the powerful and literate, and activities that historically required careful records. Answering specific historical questions will send the researcher to archives, genealogical records, and old newspapers, but what about the powerless, the poor, and the disenfranchised? Although they might have played important roles in society, their existence too often remains poorly documented.

We normally do not think of slavery in northern cities, yet slaves in New York City in the eighteenth century made up a significant portion of the population. People of European ancestry built churches with adjacent cemeteries within the city limits, but those on the fringes of society, such as slaves, had to bury their dead on land outside of the city limits that was set aside for this purpose.

A cemetery containing the remains of slaves was discovered in New York City in 1991 when contractors started to excavate a lot for a new government office building in lower Manhattan. Located at Broadway and Reade Street, it is known today as the African Burial Ground. This cemetery dates from the eighteenth century and was in use until 1795. During excavation, over 400 skeletons were removed for analysis. (These were later reinterred in 2003.)

Besides the skeletons themselves, there is evidence of specific cultural practices of that period.[27] Many of the teeth were filed and modified, a custom common in western and central African cultures. Most, but not all, of the bodies were buried in wooden coffins, and the most common artifacts recovered were shroud pins, which held together the cloth used to wrap the bodies. Some cultural items were placed into the coffin with the body, including jewelry, glass beads, and coins.

The coffins were oriented pointing west. We do not know exactly what this means, but several explanations have been suggested, including a belief that on the Day of Judgment, the bodies would sit upright in their graves with their eyes to the east, the direction of the rising sun and the direction of Africa, their

Figure 8.7 African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City. Remains of more than 10,000 African Americans were buried in this cemetery in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries.

Source: Wikimedia

homeland. Although only about 400 graves were excavated, it has been estimated that as many as 10,000 people were buried in the cemetery throughout the eighteenth century. Today, the burial grounds have been made into a memorial park (Figure 8.7).

Secondary burials

Funeral rituals sometimes include two burials. The first takes place at death and involves burial or some other disposition of the body. The **secondary burial** takes place at a later time, perhaps months or years later. This second phase often marks the end of the mourning period and commonly involves digging up, processing, and reburying the body in some way. This is sometimes related to conceptions of the soul and the idea that what happens to the body mirrors or, in some way, affects what happens to the soul after death. Eighteenth-century Choctaws (Southeast culture area) placed the dead on scaffolds outside the villages. Several months later, *bone pickers* with long fingernails removed the decomposing flesh from the skeleton and placed the bones in a community bone house. Likewise, Mandans of the Northern Plains allowed the body of the deceased to decay on a scaffold before the bones were collected, wrapped in animal hides, and buried in the village refuse area or on a riverbank. The skull was placed among the crania of other clan members encircling the scaffold.

Among the Murngins of Australia, each kin group is associated with one or more sacred water holes where totemic spirits live. The spirit comes out of the water hole, often in a father's dream, and asks the father to point out its mother; the spirit then enters its mother's womb. If a baby dies, its spirit returns to the water hole, becomes a spirit once again, and waits to be reborn. When an adult dies, the spirit returns to the totemic well, where it will always remain a spirit, never again to be reborn.

After death has occurred, totemic designs are painted on the body during a celebration and it is then carried to the grave. The grave is a symbol of the sacred totemic well, and the body is placed into the grave, laid out straight with the face down. Then, the grave is filled in.

After two or three months or more, the body is exhumed. Any remaining flesh is removed from the bones, and the bones are washed. Some small bones, such as finger bones, may be kept as relics by close relatives. The cleaned bones are placed on bark paper and made into a bundle, which is tended for several months. Afterward, a coffin is made from a tree trunk hollowed out by termites. The bones are broken up with a stone and placed into the log. The log is left to rot, and the bones are left to decay.

Cremation

Cremation is not as common as burial, yet many cultures practice cremation for a variety of reasons. Hindu cremation rituals are elaborate and involve a procession to the crematorium, where prayers are offered on behalf of the deceased. It is customary to wear white at these ceremonies, never black. Following cremation, Hindus customarily scatter the ashes into a sacred body of water or a place important to the deceased. In modern industrial societies, cremation is becoming more popular as land becomes more and more valuable and crowded, and less is available for cemeteries. Also, cremation is more economical than burial and more popular as the cost of burial increases.

Among the Yanomamös, after a person has died, the body is decorated. It is then brought to a pile of firewood set up in the middle of the community, and the body is burned. The smoke

from the fire is thought to be contaminating, and bows and arrows are washed afterward. Children and the ill leave the village while the body is being cremated to avoid contamination from the smoke. After cooling, bits of unburned bones and teeth are removed from the ashes and saved in a hollow log.

Yanomamös practice **endocannibalism**, meaning they consume the remains of their own group. (We have also seen the example of ritual eating of noncremated bodies among the Fores in Chapter 1.) The cremated bones are pulverized and placed into several small gourds. Later, a series of memorial rituals will be performed in which the ground ashes from the gourds will be added to a plantain soup and consumed. Yanomamös say they do this so that the dead will find a home in the bodies of the living. They are horrified by the unfeeling practice of leaving the dead to rot in the ground—a good example of cultural relativism.

Mummification

In some cultures, such as those that practice cremation, it is important to destroy the body to release the soul. Other cultures stress the importance of maintaining the integrity of the body after death. The practice of embalming is not intended so much to preserve the body for all time as to prevent decay during the funeral period and to permit the display of a lifelike body. Some cultures, however, stress the need to prevent the decay of the flesh for all time and may practice smoking the body or preserving it in salt or oil.

To the ancient Egyptians, death was the next step in the continuation of life. To participate in this new life, the body had to be preserved. The Egyptians developed a process of **mummification** that, by the New Kingdom times (ca. 1570–1070 BCE), was able to preserve the body thoroughly.

The process of mummification was complex and time-consuming and could be practiced in its complete form only for the important and wealthy. In one of the most common techniques, they would remove as much of the water in the body as possible by burying it in the mineral natron for 70 days. The internal organs were removed and preserved in jars, and the body cavity was filled with resin-soaked linen. The body itself was then wrapped in additional linen, and hot resin was painted on the wrapping to form a hard layer. Finally, the entire body was wrapped in a cast made of linen and plaster.

While mummification is usually associated with ancient Egypt, it appears that mummification was widely practiced in Britain during the Bronze Age (2200 to 750 BCE). However, this practice was quite crude when compared to the elaborate technology of Egypt. While this kind of mummification delayed decomposition, eventually, the flesh decayed, leaving only the skeleton. In a normal burial, bacteria from the gut create tiny holes in the bone. Microscopic analysis of mummified bones lacks such holes since mummification prevented or slowed down this process. However, analysis shows that only a small percentage of Bronze Age bodies were processed this way. Techniques included removal of the internal organs, smoking the body over a fire, or burial for a time in a peat bog, an environment very hostile to bacteria.

Exposure

Another possibility is to *expose the body* to the elements or to be consumed by animals. This very effectively and quickly reduces the body to just bones. In some cases, the bones would

then be collected for further processing or burial. Again, the disposal method may reflect soul beliefs—in this case, the belief that once the soul has departed the body, the physical body itself is unimportant. Among the Inuits living in the Arctic, exposure was largely done out of necessity because the ground was unsuitable for burial, and fuel was unavailable for cremation. Other Native American societies placed the body up in a tree or on a high platform, where it would be exposed to the elements. Sometimes, the body would be placed in a cave, and in the hot, arid climate of the American Southwest, the body would become a natural mummy.

In Tibet and some parts of China, some monastic communities practice **sky burial**, a funeral practice in which the body of the deceased is exposed so that it can be consumed by animals, frequently vultures who gather in large herds in *charnel grounds*—funeral zones. This practice is associated with Vajrayana Buddhism, a Tibetan Buddhist sect, where the soul is believed to transmigrate at death, making the body of no use. For Tibetan Buddhists, the practice is related to important concepts such as the impermanence of life and, through providing food for living creatures, generosity, compassion, and the interrelatedness of all life. Because of increasing government restrictions, urbanization, and the decimation of the vulture population, operational charnel grounds are declining today.

U.S. death rituals in the nineteenth century

In the United States in the early nineteenth century, a person would most likely die at home, especially in rural areas, surrounded by family, friends, clergy, and perhaps a physician. Death was often a public affair, and the community would show concern about the medical and religious condition of the dying person.

Once death occurred, the close members of the family took responsibility for the preparation of the body for burial. This was done primarily by female family members rather than a professional undertaker. The body was ritually washed and groomed, a cloth or shroud was wrapped around the body, and the corpse was placed in a coffin, most likely made after death to the measurements of the person.

The body stayed in the home for one to three days in the parlor. Furniture was removed, mirrors were covered, and black crepe was hung. If the weather was warm, ice was often placed around the body to slow decay, and family members would keep a vigil over the body while visitors came to the house to view the deceased, recite sections from the Bible, socialize, and eat.

Finally, after a brief service, the family and friends formed a procession, and the coffin was carried to the gravesite. Early in the century, especially in rural areas, the body would be buried on family land; however, as communities grew, burials more frequently occurred in cemeteries. If the distance between the home and the cemetery was short, the coffin would be conveyed by the family; later, this was replaced by the hearse, a horse-drawn carriage specially built for this purpose that could be rented from a livery stable. Sometimes, the procession stopped at a church for a public funeral service and perhaps a final viewing of the body before continuing to the graveyard. The body would finally be buried in the ground or placed in an aboveground tomb.

Things changed during the Civil War, during which more than 600,000 men died. (This is a very large number, especially when compared with the 57,777 who died during the Vietnam

War and the 405,399 who died in World War II.) After a battle, there were so many corpses that it was not possible to give them the respectful treatment expected during other times. However, attempts were made to give the bodies a proper burial if at all possible and to mark the graves so that relatives could locate the bodies later. Moreover, many families wanted the remains shipped home to be buried with proper ceremony in the family plots, and they would provide money for this purpose. In 1862, Congress authorized the establishment of military cemeteries, and 12 were created during that year near major battlefields, forts, and hospitals. These included Arlington National Cemetery across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., on the estate that had belonged to Confederate General Robert E. Lee (Figure 8.8).

Sometimes, a family member would find a grave that was located near a battlefield, remove the remains, and ship them home. A thriving business developed in metal, cement, and marble coffins that would preserve the remains for a time. However, the most significant development in the area of corpse preservation was the increasing use of *embalming*, a process that did not occur at the local funeral when a person died in his or her own bed.

Embalming was first practiced in the U.S. in the 1840s to preserve medical cadavers. It was not until the Civil War that this process became widely used by the general population to preserve the bodies of those who had died in battle so that they could be shipped home for proper burial. Undertakers who specialized in embalming set up shops near hospitals and army camps and in tents next to battlefields. This was adapted to be used more widely in U.S. society after the war.

U.S. funeral rituals today

U.S society is very heterogeneous, and there is a lot of diversity in funeral practices, especially among recent immigrants. However, we can describe what might be called a "traditional U.S. funeral."

Figure 8.8 Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia has nearly 400,000 burials.
Source: Wikimedia

Today, most people in the United States die in hospitals or nursing homes. When the individual is formally pronounced dead, the care of the body passes from the medical to the ritual specialists: the clergy and the funeral director. The death is announced in the obituary section of the local newspaper and now, more often, online on funeral websites to notify extended family and friends. The body is then removed to the funeral home, where it is prepared by embalming to preserve the body for viewing. (Not all bodies are embalmed. Orthodox Judaism, for example, prohibits embalming; the bodies are refrigerated, and burial takes place soon after death.)

Before the funeral ritual, there is often a viewing at which the body is displayed—the corpse is usually dressed in meaningful clothing and "styled" so that the individual appears as much as possible to be in a natural, "living" state. There is little formal ritual at a viewing, yet there appear to be standards in the objects displayed (such as flowers and photographs), people dressed in somber colors, and condolences shared with the family. People often sit or stand around and tell stories of the deceased.

People in the United States have relatively little experience with death compared with members of other societies and are often ill at ease in its presence. Commonly, a person will not attend his or her first funeral until adulthood. In other societies, children would be present throughout a person's illness, death, and funeral. There is also a special vocabulary for things associated with U.S. funerals that is thought to be more acceptable than more traditional terms—*funeral director* for undertaker and *casket* for coffin, for example.

The viewing is followed by the funeral ritual, which may be religious or secular. U.S. funeral rituals are relatively short, usually lasting a half hour to an hour. Typically, friends, neighbors, and coworkers will take a few hours out of a normal working day to attend the funeral before returning home or back to work. These rituals are relatively quiet; there is little outward expression of grief. The casket is then taken in procession to the gravesite, where there is usually a short graveside ritual. Often, the mourners leave the gravesite before the grave is filled in. This is followed by an informal gathering of family and friends at a family member's home that includes informal feasting and conversation, usually with little or no ritual.

In recent times, some changes have been seen in U.S. practices around death. Cremation has become a popular alternative to burial, and the growth of grief recovery therapy shows a new recognition that funerals and U.S. culture do not always provide the best means of coping with such events. Even modern technology has had an impact, with announcements of deaths, condolences, and memorials taking place through social media. (See Box 8.2 for a discussion of roadside memorials.)

Box 8.2 Roadside memorials

Unlike a formal, structured funeral that takes place in a space designated for death and mourning, roadside memorials are informal and mark the spot where the death occurred rather than the final resting place for the body (Figure 8.9). These memorials can be found not just all over the United States but all over the world. The memorials vary but generally consist of a cross and flowers, pictures of the deceased, and other personal items.

These public markers of private grief are most commonly found at sites of traffic accidents and usually appear quite quickly after the incident. Some are temporary, but some last for years and may be tended to and added to during that time. The memorials tend to mark deaths that are sudden and unexpected. In addition to those found at sites of traffic accidents, such impromptu memorials were seen at Columbine High School following the shootings there, at Buckingham Palace after the death of Princess Diana, and near the sites of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon after September 11, 2001.

Figure 8.9 A roadside memorial in Ireland.
Source: Wikimedia

Roadside memorials in the United States are not uncontroversial. For some, they involve the issue of freedom of speech; for others, they violate the separation of church and state (an overwhelming majority of the memorials contain crosses). There is no federal law governing the memorials, and states have dealt with the issue in different ways. Here, the concern is generally one of traffic safety, as the displays might interfere with traffic or distract drivers. Some states ban roadside memorials; others allow them but may remove them if they are thought to interfere with traffic; other states have official memorials that can be purchased from the appropriate governmental agency.

Days of death

Festivals that emphasize death and frame it as a concept are found cross-culturally. The one most familiar in the United States is probably Halloween, although few know much about the origins and religious underpinnings of what has become a secular day of costumes and candy.

Halloween

In essence, the holiday of Halloween has its origins as a case of cultural contact, a theme that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 12. The basis of this holiday is an ancient Celtic festival called Samhain. Samhain was New Year's Day and was celebrated on November 1. The Celts believed that during Samhain, the portal that normally separates the worlds of the living and the dead opened, and the souls of those who had died during the past year could then move into the otherworld. To celebrate the day, special foods were prepared as offerings, and people dressed up as spirits and wild animals.

With the conversion of Ireland to Christianity in 300–400 CE, many local religious beliefs and practices were redefined. In a practice that continues to this day, Christian missionaries were encouraged to reframe local customs in Christian terms. November 1 was soon declared All Saints Day, a day to honor Christian saints, particularly those who did not otherwise have a feast day. The day before All Saints Day, October 31, became known as the Eve of All Saints, or the Even of All Hallows, which was shortened to Hallow Even or Halloween. However, the meaning of All Saints Day was not at all related to the original Celtic holiday, and it was not very successful in replacing it.

Around 900 CE, the Christian Church added the holiday of All Souls Day on November 2. This holiday honors all of the people who have died during the past year and is much closer in meaning to Samhain. Many of the traditional beliefs and customs of Samhain were preserved, including the idea that night was a time for the wandering dead, offering food and drink to masked revelers, and lighting bonfires. Stylized representations of death, including skeletons, are common.

Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos) *in Mexico and the Andes*

In Mexico, the Day of the Dead is associated with the Catholic holidays of All Saints Day (November 1) and All Souls Day (November 2) and cultural contact between Aztec rituals and Spanish Catholic traditions. The Aztecs set aside a month (corresponding to the end of July and August) to honor the dead. The festivities were overseen by Mictecacihuatl, the "Lady of the Dead." Later, Spanish priests moved the celebration so that it would coincide with All Saints Day and All Souls Day and be more easily integrated into Mexican customs.

In what is often referred to as the "folk Catholicism" of Mexico, the dead are seen as intermediaries between the living and God. The Day of the Dead is a time of family reunion for all family members, living and dead, and is an expression of family continuity. This is not seen as macabre or a solemn event but as a celebration. During the first week in November, shops offer many special items for this celebration. Included are many representations of skeletons, elaborate wreaths and crosses, and *papal picado*, or tissue paper cutouts. Food items are also popular, including special bread called *pan de muerto* and skulls and coffins made of sugar.

Figure 8.10 (a) The Day of the Dead. A woman in Michoacán, Mexico, decorates a grave during *Día de los Muertos*. (b) Ofrendas and guagüitas. Iconic Andean symbols and bread babies for *Todos Los Muertos*—these bread icons were prepared by M. Snipes and Florentina.

Source: Photo courtesy of M. Snipes

An altar is set up in the home with pictures of saints, candles, incense, vases of flowers, and portraits of the deceased. Offerings of food and drink are made to the dead, especially food that was a favorite of that person while he or she was alive. Gravesites are decorated, and a feast takes place in the graveyard (Figure 8.10a). The souls do not physically consume the food but are believed to absorb its essence.

In the northwestern Andes of Argentina, an area also colonized by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, All Souls Day (Day of the Dead) is called *Día de Todos los Muertos*. As in Mexico, it is a time for families to gather to remember those they have lost. In the highland Indigenous communities, many people believe that there is a transition period for the soul once a person has died. These beliefs are *syncretic* and involve Catholic teachings mixed with an Indigenous veneration of Pachamama (Mother Earth).

When a person dies, the body is washed and dressed for burial but will be kept in the home for eight days while people visit the departed, pray, and mourn. During that time, they believe that the soul is trying to separate from the body but continues in and around the household, so it is important to speak nicely of the departed. After eight days, the body will be buried, and then, during the following three years, the soul will visit and check on their family and household, specifically during the celebration of "Los Muertos."

During this holiday, the family cooks or purchases the favorite foods of their recently departed (candy is commonly purchased for children) and sets a place at the table for the

visiting soul (Figure 8.10b). As in Mexico, the dining area will be decorated with photographs, flowers, and other mementos of the deceased, and on the evening of November 2, the family will gather together around the table with plates set out for their deceased and will eat as a family, living and dead. During the meal, they will look for signs that a soul is visiting during the celebration.

While conducting fieldwork in the Andes, anthropologist Marjorie M. Snipes was invited to prepare a plate for a family member who had died three years previously in the United States. While eating the celebration meal with one of the families in the community, a moth came into the dining area, flying around the candles on the table and then circling around Snipes' head. Florentina, her host, motioned for her to be quiet and attentive, as the moth was a sign of her grandmother's soul coming to greet her and express gratitude for the meal. It was a very solemn and reverent moment for everyone there, a sign of ritual success and family connections.

After three years, the soul is believed to have fully transitioned to their new life away from their family, although many families continue to offer plates (called *ofrendas*) to deceased family members long beyond this period as a form of remembrance.

Conclusion

Issues of life and death are of central concern for the domain of religion. What makes us alive? What happens to us when we die? Can my soul exist without my body? Can my body exist without my soul? Although cultures will answer these questions differently, humans come to some sort of understanding and explanation of these phenomena. For example, the belief in a soul is widespread, as is the idea that the soul survives the death of the body, at least for some time. A belief in a soul explains many things for us, such as an individual's life force and unique personality and what happens to them when they die. So important to us are the souls of other people that they often remain a part of the world of the living, numbered among the beings that populate the supernatural world.

Our unease about death manifests itself in supernatural creatures such as ghosts, vampires, and zombies. Through these beings, the divisions between life and death become less clear, and many other cultural anxieties come into play. In the next chapter, we will turn our attention to other supernatural beings more commonly associated with religion: gods and spirit beings.

Summary

The belief in a soul residing within a person is found across cultures. A *soul* is the noncorporeal, spiritual component of an individual that usually takes on their personality and has an existence after death. During life, the soul may leave the body, such as during dreams or sleep. Dreams are seen as adventures of the soul, and illness may be caused by the absence of a soul that must be retrieved by a shaman. Death is the permanent withdrawal of the soul. How the soul is perceived varies widely, including the number of souls, the size of the soul, and where the soul is located in the body. The soul may

retain its identity after death for a limited time or eternity. The destination of the soul after death may depend on the behavior of the person during life, the social status of the individual, or perhaps the way in which the person died. Funeral rituals may assist the soul on its journey to the land of the dead and protect the living from any negative influences of the soul. Sometimes, the soul returns and animates another individual, a concept termed *reincarnation*.

One possible fate for a soul is that it becomes part of the group of supernatural beings known as *ancestors*. Even after death, an ancestor is still a valued member of the kinship group and reinforces ideas of social roles, contributes to social harmony and social solidarity, and punishes descendants for misbehavior.

Ghosts are often seen as negative forces that remain in the vicinity of the community after death, bringing about illness and other misfortune, although their role is sometimes ambiguous. Ghosts manifest as *apparitions* that demonstrate intelligence and personality, whereas *hauntings* are replays from the past. In contrast, vampires and zombies are creatures that have no souls. *Vampires* are believed to be individuals who have recently died, usually before their time, and have returned to bring death to others. *Zombies* are corpses that have been raised from their graves and animated.

Death rituals or funerals are rites of passage that move the individual from the status of a living person to that of an ancestor or other post-death status. Funerals vary among cultures in a number of ways: the form of the expression of grief, the role of the ritual in terms of what will happen to the individual in the afterlife, the ritual ways in which the family and community separate themselves from the dead to avoid contamination or illness, how the living are reorganized in society to accommodate for the absence of the deceased, and the method of disposal of the corpse.

Many cultures allow for the return of the spirits of the dead at special times of the year. A familiar example is Halloween, which is based on an old Celtic holiday when the portal that normally is believed to separate the worlds of the living and the dead was opened, and the souls of those who had died during the past year could then move into the otherworld. The early Church transformed this celebration into All Saints Day and All Souls Day on November 1 and 2, respectively. The Day of the Dead is also associated with these Catholic holidays.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at http://routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 8.

Study questions

1. If permitted, visit a cemetery and observe the different types of burial—underground, vault, no tombstone. What are some common designs? Are there numerous burial vaults? Is there a potter's field? Do the different types of burials signify social class differences? What types of symbols and mementos do you observe?
2. Have you ever encountered a ghost? Does your family have a ghost story? If so, describe the encounter. Do you consider the experience real or a hallucination?

3. Describe the customs associated with contemporary Halloween festivals. How have they changed from the past? What evidence do you find of "souls, ghosts, and death" in the celebration of this holiday?
4. Many Hollywood horror films depict images of ghosts, vampires, and zombies. Are these Hollywood images similar or different from how they appear in films from different cultural traditions?
5. Have you ever attended a funeral? If so, how was it like or unlike the traditional funeral described in this chapter?
6. Why do you think cultures, including our own, put so much emphasis on souls?

Notes

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8 R.M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), pp. 59–60.
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12 Ibid., pp. 35–36.
13 G. Parrinder, p. 548.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., pp. 548–549.
17 Ibid., pp. 549–550.
18 P. Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 16.
19 Ibid.
20 M.E. Bell, *Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England's Vampires* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).
21 The term *consumption* comes from the observation that those who were ill appeared to "waste away," yet at the same time they showed a fierce will to live. This is reflected in the folk belief that the vampire's desire for sustenance drives it to feed on its living relatives, causing the wasting away.
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24 www.harvardmagazine.com/2017/10/are-zombies-real
25 G. Urban, "Ritual Wailing in Amerindian Brazil." *American Anthropologist* N.S. 90(2):385–400, 1988.
26 K. Heider, *Grand Valley Dani: Peaceful Warriors*, 3rd ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1997), p. 132.
27 For more on this research, see the work of anthropologist M.L. Blakey, "The New York African Burial Ground Project: An Examination of Enslaved Lives: A Construction of Ancestral Ties." *Transforming Anthropology* 7(1):53–58, 1998.

Chapter 9

Gods and spirits

Ghosts, ancestors, and vampires are transformed human beings. However, there are many supernatural beings that do not have human origins—these include **gods** and **spirits**. Although we recognize these as two separate types of supernatural entities, this division is, to some degree, arbitrary. Generally speaking, gods are individualized supernatural beings, each with a distinctive name, personality, and sphere of influence that encompasses the life of an entire community or a major segment of the community. Spirits are generally less powerful than gods, usually more localized, and they frequently involve collections of nonindividualized supernatural beings without specific names and identities.

Supernatural beings are usually a crucial aspect of a religious system. Myths describe their actions, and their behaviors may be seen as a model for human behavior. Rituals are often directed toward superhuman beings, specifically to placate, praise, or make requests of them.

Spirits

Nonindividualized spirits include such well-known examples as the leprechauns of Ireland, the *jinn* of the Middle East, and the *kami* of Japan. There are also spirits that are individually recognized, such as a guardian spirit, an ancestral spirit, and a shaman's spirit helper. In contrast with gods, spirits are less powerful and more focused on particular individuals, families, or groups of specialists.

Whereas gods may live in a remote location, such as Mount Olympus, the home of the Greek gods, spirits live in the human world, interacting with and concerned about humans. Spirits often exhibit complex personalities, and they can be friendly or harmful. They provide protection, success, and luck but also are blamed for minor mishaps. Because they are closely connected to people and are involved in everyday human affairs, they can sometimes offer assistance. Offerings, entertainment, and attention will promote the development of a beneficial relationship between people and the spirit world. But ignoring their presence or, worse yet, doing something to harm or offend them can have negative consequences, such as the loss of a crop, infertility, illness, or the death of a child.

Because spirits live in the human world, they often reside in physical objects—some natural, others human-made. North American archaeologists excavating burials oftentimes find pottery with "kill" holes in the bottom. These perforations represent the symbolic

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destruction of pottery vehicles in preparation for burial—one interpretation is that punching holes in plates and bowls interred with the deceased owner releases the spirit that was infused into the vessel during its creation.

Places of special beauty or unusual characteristics, such as a sacred grove or a waterfall, are often said to be inhabited by spirits. These locations may be venerated—people will often travel to such places to ask favors of the spirits believed to reside there—but these places may also be considered dangerous. The Pitt River tribe has a belief in *Mis Misa*, a spirit that lives in the mountain and keeps the universe balanced. Burials face Mount Shasta because it leads to the spirit world; spirits of the dead are flown on the backs of eagles to this mountaintop, their last stop before reaching the Milky Way, where they will permanently reside. To Hopis, the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff are the ancestral home of the katsina ancestors, who bring rain. Hopi pilgrims leave yearly offerings to the ancestors who bring life (Chapter 4).[1]

Unusual natural objects—such as a remarkable or strange stone or plant—also may contain a spirit, as might a human-made object such as a statue or a **shrine**, a constructed place regarded as holy because of its association with a supernatural being. Sometimes special structures are built so that spirits are enticed to take up residence in them to provide protection or good luck to the builder.

Japanese *kami*
Associated with Shintoism, *kami* are venerated and respected as spirits and deities that inhabit almost all aspects of Japanese life, including nature, landscapes, ancestors, plants, and animals. Primarily hidden from sight, highly mobile, and ever-changing, they can nurture and bless or cause harm and destruction, depending on the nature of the interaction. While there are many hundreds of *kami*, one of the better-known is 稲荷大神 (Inari Ōkami), the *kami* of rice, tea, and *sake* (rice wine). The only food traditionally shared at meals, rice is the single most important contact between people and deities. In 1993, Japan experienced a severe shortage of rice due to a series of poor harvests from 1991–1992. When U.S. and Japanese trade negotiators discussed rice importation, protests broke out across the islands. Known as the "Rice Riots of the Heisei Era," the intense reaction was provoked in part because foreign (U.S.) rice would be "soulless" and insulting to the Japanese *kami*.

Dani views of the supernatural

One group of the Danis, the Mulia Valley Danis, live in the highlands of New Guinea, in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya. Because Danis themselves seldom refer to their belief system, it can be difficult for an outsider to learn about Dani religious practices from an insider (emic) perspective. Questions about rituals and beliefs are greeted either by silence or by the familiar "That is just the way we do things" or "This is the way our fathers did it."

An anthropologist using an etic perspective can attempt to understand the underlying structure and logic of Dani beliefs and practices, although Danis themselves might not understand or accept this structure and logic (Table 9.1). For example, anthropologist Douglas James Hayward notes that Danis appear to organize their world into complementary pairs.[2] Their physical landscape is divided into cultivated and noncultivated land, and animals are divided into those that live in association with people and those that do not. Likewise, their society is organized

Table 9.1 The supernatural world of the Danis

	Beneficent	*Malevolent*
Spirits and gods		
Close	Ghosts*	Ghosts*
	Personal guardian spirits	Male and female forest spirits
	Forest spirits	Swamp spirits
	Spirits that control rains	Sorcery spirits
	God who controls flooding	Spirits associated with illness
Remote	God who shaped Earth's surface	Spirits from neighboring territories
	Guardians of the Danis	
Non-spirit life forms		
Close	—	Enemies
Remote	The sun (female)	Inhabitants of the sky
	The moon (male, husband of sun)	

* Ghosts are malevolent in that they cause misfortune and illness. They are also beneficent in that they warn the village of enemy raiding parties.

in terms of a system in which all individuals are placed into one of two social groups that intermarry with one another. Using the principle of complementary pairs, Hayward divides the Dani supernatural world into several categories using three criteria: Are the beings physical or spirit? Are they beneficent or malevolent? Are they close or far away?

The beings that inhabit the Dani world can be either spirit or physical ("truly present"). Physical beings are mortal and subject to the laws of nature. They include people, animals, and plants. Spirit beings are immortal and subject to the laws of nature.

The identification of a being as beneficent or malevolent is not always easy because this often depends on context. For example, ghosts are spirits of the recently deceased that linger near the village in which they once lived, reluctant to leave (Figure 9.1). If the community fails to perform funeral rituals in a satisfactory manner, the ghost becomes disappointed and may cause trouble for the community. Although ghosts have a negative influence on Dani life, they also can be beneficent and are consulted in divination ceremonies. In addition, they can warn the community of the approach of an enemy raiding party.

Dani rituals focus on those spirit beings that live close by and play significant roles in their lives. This includes close beneficent spirits, such as guardian spirits associated with nature (called *weya*), including forest spirits, rain spirits, and flood spirits. The *weya* spirits control the rains. When they become violent, they send lightning storms—trees struck by lightning are visual evidence of their presence and power; however, they are also seen as benevolent beings because they bring rain.

Forest spirits and swamp spirits can also be close malevolent spirits. In the forest lurk male forest spirits, who seduce women traveling alone through the forest, and female forest spirits, who seduce men by taking the form of their wives and girlfriends. Sexual intercourse with such a spirit could cause death for the man (unless a pig has been sacrificed), as well as the birth of a child that looks exactly like a human child but only has half a human soul.

Many close malevolent spirits, often identified with particular animals, are associated with illnesses. For example, a spirit associated with frogs causes illnesses characterized by cold, clammy hands and feet; a spirit associated with owls brings about sore throats; and a spirit associated with lizards is responsible for the swelling of the limbs and joints.

Remote malevolent spirits live in other people's territories. They are a danger only when someone brings a spirit into one's home territory. When returning home from a journey, the traveler closes the trail behind him by placing a "spirit restrainer" composed of clumps of grass on sticks. The spirit cannot go beyond or around the restrainer and, therefore, cannot follow the traveler home.

Apart from enemies, the only other malevolent non-spirit beings are a community of little people who live in the sky. Being lazy, they stole food from their neighbors' gardens rather than growing it themselves and were driven out by the Danis, climbing into the sky. Eventually, they learned how to farm, but these little people like to urinate on their former enemies during rains. Men do not like to go out of doors on days when it is raining or misty.

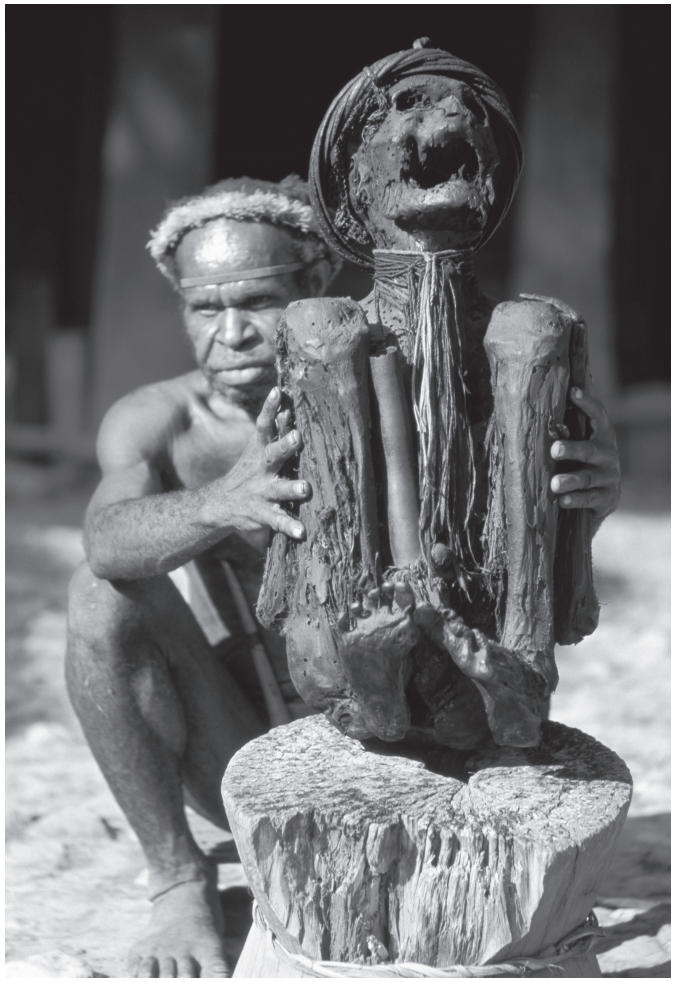

Figure 9.1 A Dani man with a mummified ancestral chief; ancestors play an important role in Dani religious practices.

Source: Alamy

Guardian spirits and the Native American vision quest

An important element in many Native American cultures is direct contact with supernatural beings and supernatural powers. An example is the *vision quest*, in which the individual enters an altered state of consciousness, contacts the world of spirit beings, and receives a gift of supernatural power. The spirit beings encountered in the visions are often referred to as *guardian spirits*. An individual, usually male, may attempt to make contact with a guardian spirit either specifically, as part of a coming-of-age ritual, or continually throughout his adult life, as a means of attaining protection, guidance, and identity. In this worldview, it is only through the attainment of a connection with the supernatural and the receipt of supernatural power that a person can be successful in life.

Throughout Native North America, power is connected to people through spirits and spirit helpers. In 1923, anthropologist and folklorist Ruth Benedict coined the term

guardian spirit to describe the relationship between spirit helpers and individuals who have access to them during their daily lives. The relationship is "remarkably intimate and ever present. An individual's Helper is not held in reserve only to be called upon as needed, but is consistently used as a powerful ally embodied within its holder throughout the day."[3] In many cases, a guardian, or helper spirit, is acquired during vision quest rites.

Among the Ojibwas of the Great Lakes area, the vision quest is carried out at puberty. However, boys begin preparing early in life with periodic fasting. They are given instructions about how to induce a good vision and how to recognize and reject a bad vision. At the appropriate time, the boy is led into the forest to a platform that has been constructed in a tall pine tree. He is left there alone to fast until he receives his vision. The vision is interpreted as a journey into the supernatural world. The boy is shown the path his life should take and the spirit beings who will be his guardian spirits. He is also told of certain objects that he can acquire that will serve as physical symbols of his relationship with the guardian spirits. After a successful vision quest, the boy assumes the status of an adult man.

Among the Wind River Shoshonis of Wyoming, vision quests are undertaken not just at puberty but throughout life. Supernatural power can be attained from guardian spirits in visions and dreams. In the vision quest, the supplicant, usually male, rides to a special place with rock art drawings (pictographs) in the foothills. After cleansing himself in a creek or lake, he goes to the rock ledge beneath the drawings. Naked except for a blanket, he waits for the vision. The vision is brought on by a combination of fasting, enduring the cold, sleep deprivation, and smoking tobacco, all ways of entering an altered state of consciousness. What is actually seen varies but commonly includes trials that must be overcome before the spirit appears. When the spirit appears to bestow supernatural power on the man, it is often perceived as an animal. The spirit frequently gives specific instructions, such as wearing a special item or avoiding certain people or behaviors. For example, a deer spirit that gives the gift of speed while running might instruct the man to wear a deer tail sewn on his clothes or on a ribbon around his neck. Among the Shoshonis, a man can acquire several guardian spirits to aid him in his life.

Among Indigenous Plains tribes, power was ideally acquired through the vision quest rite, and a few fortuitous individuals received personal powers from a dream spirit that protected them from enemies or gave them specific medical knowledge or hunting prowess. Men and some women acquired powers as personal guides, a spirit force to be consulted when necessary. Some even had the ability to amass powers from a multitude of spiritual forces. Oftentimes, multiple individuals obtained personal powers from the same source and formed common interest associations or societies connected to warfare, healing the sick and wounded, or serving the spiritual needs of the people. Those with the greatest power were affiliated with the principal socio-religious institutions and participated in tribal ceremonies like the Sun Dance.

Those who received sacred and mysterious powers from dream spirits were instructed to assemble medicine bundles composed of various objects—animal parts, birds and feathers, plants, and minerals—related to the cosmological component of their vision. They also learned songs that activated powers when the bundles were demonstrated in public performances. Men of power—and sometimes women—possessed esoteric knowledge and extraordinary capabilities that could benefit themselves and others. Power visions validated leadership and were a ritualized means of innovation and transformation in Plains religions. As in other Plains cultures, Kiowa men acquired medicine bundles affiliated with power through visions, inheritance, and purchase, though the greatest power came from visions (Box 9.1).[4]

Box 9.1 Kiowa vision quests

Since Kiowas believed that lofty elevations were closest to the "spirits that travel in the air," mountains were the preferred location for vision quests. Mount Scott, the second highest elevation in the Wichita Mountains, at 2,467 feet, was a favorite spot (Figure 9.2), and Mount Sheridan, just to the west, was the second choice. In 1935, Kiowa artist and calendar keeper Silver Horn referred to Mount Scott as a "vision-seeker's paradise." If the initiate's encampment was not close to the mountains, the highest hill was sought. Kiowas preferred burying their dead in "high spots," so gravesites often were selected for vision quests if the deceased had been a medicine man or keeper of a tribal or personal medicine bundle. It was believed that the spirits of these powerful individuals resided near their gravesites.

Figure 9.2 From the summit of Mount Scott, looking west towards Mount Sheridan in the background.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

Typical vision quest rituals began when the power seeker left his encampment, accompanied by a close friend or relative. Pilgrimages to the Wichita Mountains or elevated locations sometimes led the seeker and his companion 20 to 30 miles from home since band camps were not always in proximity to the mountains. Once the predetermined destination was reached, the seeker clambered towards a lofty resting place while the traveling companion departed, promising to return in four days. Clad only in a breechcloth, moccasins, and a bison robe wrapped around his shoulders, hair side out, the seeker smeared his face and arms with white clay, perhaps to symbolize the "special medicine power" of the albino buffalo. Necessary ritual paraphernalia included a long-stemmed, black stone pipe, its accouterments, and a pouch of tobacco.

By late evening, the seeker ascended to the highest possible location, prepared a bed of sage covered with a buffalo robe, and then sat down cross-legged facing east to begin the vision rite. Before smoking, he held tobacco above his head to placate the spirits in the sky and then placed the offering on the ground. After packing his pipe bowl with tobacco, he took dry kindling from a buffalo horn and

lit it by striking flint against steel. (Recall that tobacco smoke carries prayers to the spirit world.)

Throughout the first night, the vision seeker smoked and prayed, crying for compassion from the spirits: "Take pity on me. I am a poor man. Give me what I ask." Then he lay down for the night. Upon awakening the next morning, the seeker smoked and prayed in the same manner, repeated the same procedure in the evening and around midnight, and any time during the night when aroused from bouts of sleep. While smoking and praying during daylight hours, the supplicant always faced the sun, and when finished, he held the pipe outward towards the sun, stem side first, recited a prayer, and then emptied the ashes on the ground as an offering. A successful vision quest was highlighted by a spirit appearing to the supplicant in a vision, bestowing him with power and its associated knowledge. If a power vision had not occurred by the fourth day of fasting, the petitioner signaled his traveling companion to return in a day or two.

Following the ordeal, if the novice received a power vision, he returned home and painted a shield with symbols of his newly acquired power. Before reaching his village, the power seeker sometimes stopped to take a sweat bath, a purification rite common to other Plains tribes before and after transcendent encounters with the supernatural. When the initiate arrived at his village, no one spoke to him about his recent experiences, nor did the young man volunteer any information to let people know exactly what had happened; he did not need to say anything, for time would tell whether he had received power.

Successful vision seekers obtained either war medicine or curing power or sometimes power to heal themselves or a sick relative. In the latter instance, a sick man might travel into the mountains to fast and pray if other shamans had failed to cure him or if he needed a vision to heal his child. For those who obtained power, disclosing details of the vision could cause the dream spirit to revoke their power because newly acquired powers were believed to manifest themselves at the proper time. Thus, a man obtaining war power proved it by returning unscathed from a hard-fought battle. Someone killed shortly after returning from a vision quest obviously had not obtained war medicine. Likewise, curing powers became apparent if they effectively helped other people. Power was validated through demonstrative experiences; those who lied about having power risked facing a premature death.[5]

Jinn

The Qur'an tells of God's creation of three types of conscious beings: humans made from clay, **angels** made from light, and **jinn** made from fire without smoke. Jinn are normally invisible, but they can make themselves visible, and in doing so, they often take the form of a human or an animal. Once visible, jinn can alter their shape and features at will. Jinn are born, live, and die; they marry, mate, and have families. Some have great powers, and

many are specifically known and named; others occur as a part of an unnamed collective of spirits. Like people, jinn have different personalities, some good and some bad. They may lie and deceive people; they enjoy playing tricks and kidnapping people; and they often tempt humans into sexual intercourse.

Sometimes, a person can forge a special relationship with a jinn, who then becomes a source of special powers. For example, a person can enter into an alliance with a jinn and become a powerful magician. The Genii of the Aladdin story is a jinn, and the stories of the *Arabian Nights* are largely stories involving jinn. Generally, people try to keep a distance between themselves and jinn because, more often than not, jinn are troublemakers. People will frequently recite verses from the Qur'an or avoid situations that attract the attention of jinn. This is the origin of many tabus surrounding blood, childbirth, and marriage because these are situations that are very attractive to jinn. The very existence of jinn causes people to be careful, yet they also provide an explanation for illness and bad luck.

Spirit possession in the Sudan

Anthropologist Janice Boddy describes the presence of three types of jinn in the small Arabic-speaking village of Hofriyat in northern Sudan.[6] *White jinn* have little effect on humans, whereas *black jinn*, or devils, are dangerous, and possession by black jinn often leads to serious illness and death. The most frequently encountered, however, are *red jinn* called *zairan* (singular: *zar*). The red color symbolizes an association with blood and fertility. *Zairan* are capable of causing illness. While these illnesses must be dealt with, they are seldom fatal.

The world of the *zairan* parallels the world of humans. *Zairan* belong to different religions, occupations, and ethnic groups, and they exhibit a range of behaviors, some good and some bad, but they generally tend to be amoral and capricious. Hofriyatis also recognize jinn as diverse ethnic and social groups—some are Europeans, West Africans, Ethiopians, Arabs, and so forth, groups with which they have had contact in the past. Yet there are no *zairan* who resemble Hofriyatis themselves.

Spirit possession occurs when a *zar* enters the body of a woman. Most possession occurs in women of childbearing age, and almost half of the adult women in the community are possessed. In these communities, the life of a woman is very restricted. Physically, she remains within the high walls of the family compound, where she is segregated from the men, eating and even sleeping in separate quarters. Her worth and happiness depend on her fertility and her ability to produce sons. The production of sons and their survival are considered women's tasks. A woman who does not have children, miscarries, has only daughters, or whose children die young is accorded a very low position in the society. She may be divorced by her husband or may have to accept a co-wife in the marriage.

Therefore, there is a great deal of anxiety in marriage, and this anxiety often leads to depression. In this case, a woman may be possessed by a *zar*. However, the *zar* may also be responsible for the misfortune surrounding her reproductive life. Once the *zar* has entered her body, she will continue to be possessed from that time on.

Although *zar* possession is a lifelong condition, it would not be accurate to describe this possession as an illness. During ceremonies, each *zar* is drummed into each woman in turn; the woman then goes into a trance. Through this relationship, the woman regains

a measure of well-being, although she must constantly pay attention to the wishes of the spirit by attending possession ceremonies on a regular basis. The possessed woman must also meet certain demands of the spirit. She must eat certain foods, wear clean, gold-colored clothing, avoid anger, and manifest other ideal feminine behaviors. As long as the relationship continues, the woman will maintain a "cure." From the spirit's point of view, this relationship gives it access to the human world. Once it possesses its host, the *zar* will be entertained and can engage in various activities.

When she is not possessed, a woman will participate in singing and drumming. Such all-female rituals provide an important outlet for otherwise isolated women. Curing rituals are enjoyable social events in a world where such social activities are relatively rare.

Christian angels and demons

Angels and demons are spirit beings that appear in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In these monotheistic religions, angels act as mediators between God and human beings and are often represented as agents of revelation, executors of divine will, or witnesses to divine activity. Angels appear in both Greek and Jewish writings but tend to play a limited role. In the New Testament of Christianity, however, angels are frequently mentioned. (e.g., "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him" [Luke 22:43].)

However, much of the popular Christian belief about angels comes not from the Bible but from the sixth-century writings of Saint Dionysus. In his work, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, he established a rank order of angels that included, in descending order, seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, and angels. Belief in angels is widespread in modern U.S. society. A poll conducted in 2023 found that 69 percent of those surveyed believe that angels and demons are active in the world.[7] Despite these numbers, there is little consensus on exactly what angels are or how they look. Descriptions range from a glowing light to a very human appearance—or perhaps the presence of the angel is felt but not seen. In general, angels are said to appear to help people in need, often as workers or messengers of God.

At the other end of the spectrum are **demons**. Although demons are frequently mentioned in the Christian Bible, no one passage gives a full account of their creation or workings. However, several Church writings have been published to clarify the subject, such as the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council from the Catholic Church in 1215. Here, it says that both the Devil and demons were originally angelic creatures created by God as good, innocent beings. They became evil by their own actions—Satan and his minions rebelled against God and, after a battle with the good angels, were cast from heaven. Satan and the demons are believed to be closely associated with human evil, including the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden and their dominion over hell.

One common activity of demons, as described in the New Testament, is *demonic possession*. This was considered a major cause of strange behaviors by humans, and several of Jesus' healing ministries involved performing demonic exorcism.

In the period roughly between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, Christian demonology reached its peak. Influential beliefs about demons were elaborated on and ornate doctrines detailing the hierarchies, invocation, methods, and exorcism of demons were

produced. This was the era of the infamous Witchcraze (Chapter 10), during which time there was a particular interest in **incubi** and **succubae**, male and female demons who have sex with humans while they sleep. Sex with an incubus was said to be responsible for the birth of demons, witches, and deformed children and the damnation of men's souls.

In 2011, a woman reported her three children—ages 7, 9, and 12—were possessed by demons in what became known as the Gary, Indiana "Demon House." Numerous visits by the police left a captain a believer after he left the home. After investigating the possessions, the Gary archdiocese authorized three exorcisms in June 2012. Although the Indiana Department of Child Services removed the children from the home, the mother regained custody within six months, and they moved to another house. The case was closed in early 2013. A year later, Zak Bagans, producer of the television series *Ghost Adventures*, bought the house and boarded himself in for an overnight "lockdown." The next morning, he declared the house "a portal to Hell" and had it demolished. The film *Demon House* (2019) documents his experiences.[8]

The belief in demonic possession is still common today among conservative Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. For many of these groups, a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible requires a belief in demons and demonic exorcism because they are mentioned so frequently in the New Testament. Over the past 20 years, there has been a dramatic rise in the U.S. of Catholic priests trained in carrying out exorcisms. See Box 9.2 for a discussion of Christian exorcism.

Box 9.2 Christian demonic exorcism in the United States

The Christian belief in demons and demonic exorcism is from the New Testament. There, we learn that Satan and his demons harass, torment, and possess humans. This possession sometimes results in new skills or strength that the person then has (by virtue of the demon). In general, possession is described as an illness, and much of Jesus' healing ministry involved performing demonic exorcism. In the New Testament, Jesus is able to perform exorcisms by merely demanding that the demons leave; his disciples do the same in the name of Jesus. ("And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not" [Luke 4:33–35]). On one occasion, Jesus exorcised a multitude of demons named Legion from a man and cast them into swine that ran into the sea and drowned (Mark 5:8–13).

In his book *American Exorcism: Expelling Demons in the Land of Plenty*, Michael Cuneo argues that the phenomenon of Christian demonic exorcism is both influenced by and reflects the wider culture in the United States. For example, he cites

the great influence of the book and later film *The Exorcist* in the early 1970s. Following the release of *The Exorcist* and other popular books, the reported incidence of demonic possession and requests for exorcism greatly increased. The film depicted a specifically Catholic event; however, official Catholic exorcisms were—and are—difficult to come by. Although the Catholic Church does believe in demonic possession and the need for exorcisms, these are uncommon events. The priest is advised to be skeptical and look for other causes first, such as mental illness, and he may only perform an exorcism with the permission of a bishop.

However, some exorcisms continued to be available through unofficial channels, particularly among priests who did not agree with the modernization of the Church following the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s and among charismatic Catholics. In the 1970s and 1980s, exorcism rituals also became popular in other Christian religions, particularly among people belonging to a religious movement called *neo-Pentecostalism*, or the charismatic renewal. In general, members of this movement were seeking a more personal and dramatic religious experience called *baptism in the Holy Spirit*, believed to be associated with various spiritual gifts (or charisms), such as speaking in tongues, prophesy, and healing. Part of this healing involved exorcisms—or deliverance ministries, as they were often called. The demons were often personal demons, such as demons of lust, anger, resentment, and addiction, as well as demons of specific illnesses, such as cancer.

Exorcism also became popular with certain groups of evangelical Protestants, particularly in the early 1980s. Cuneo estimates that there are at least 500–600 evangelical exorcism ministries today and that the number might even be significantly higher. He points out that the exorcism movement fits in very well with other cultural ideas popular in the late twentieth century in the United States. Like other self-help regimens and therapies of the era, the exorcism movement teaches that people are victims and not responsible for the bad things in their lives. Demons are to blame in much the same way that more mainstream therapies blame the ubiquitous "dysfunctional family." Cuneo writes:

> Exorcism may be a strange therapy, it may be the crazy uncle of therapies, but it's therapy nonetheless. And no less than any of the countless other therapies in the therapy-mad culture of post-sixties America, it promises liberation for the addicted, hope for the forlorn, solace for the brokenhearted. It promises a new and redeemed self, a self freed from the accumulated debris of a life badly lived or a life sadly endured.[9]

Gods

Generally speaking, gods are more powerful than spirits. They possess great supernatural powers and can control or influence major forces of nature, such as the wind, rain, and fertility. They are also personalized individuals with names, origins, and specific

attributes. Some gods are associated with social and political units such as clans and villages. The number of gods found within a religious system can vary from one to more than a thousand.

Gods are *anthropomorphic*; that is, they resemble people in their physical appearance and personalities. They are born, marry, and sometimes die. They love and lust, are wise and dull, loving and hateful, generous and miserly. Some are sympathetic to human beings; others are hostile. And like humans, gods can be influenced by gifts in the form of offerings and sacrifices, by praise and flattery, and sometimes they can be tricked.

The behavior of humans reflects the orders and commandments of the gods. Gods set up codes of behavior and punish people who do not observe them. They may prescribe that certain ritual activities be performed and create misfortune when they are not. Some gods are very concerned about the fate of human beings and will establish close relationships with them.

Types of gods

Within a particular religious system, the gods, as a collective, make up a **pantheon**. Usually, the gods within the pantheon form a hierarchy with a **supreme god** at the top. They are related to one another in various ways, often making up a large family unit characterized by family relationships, such as those seen in the Greek pantheon (Figure 9.3). The

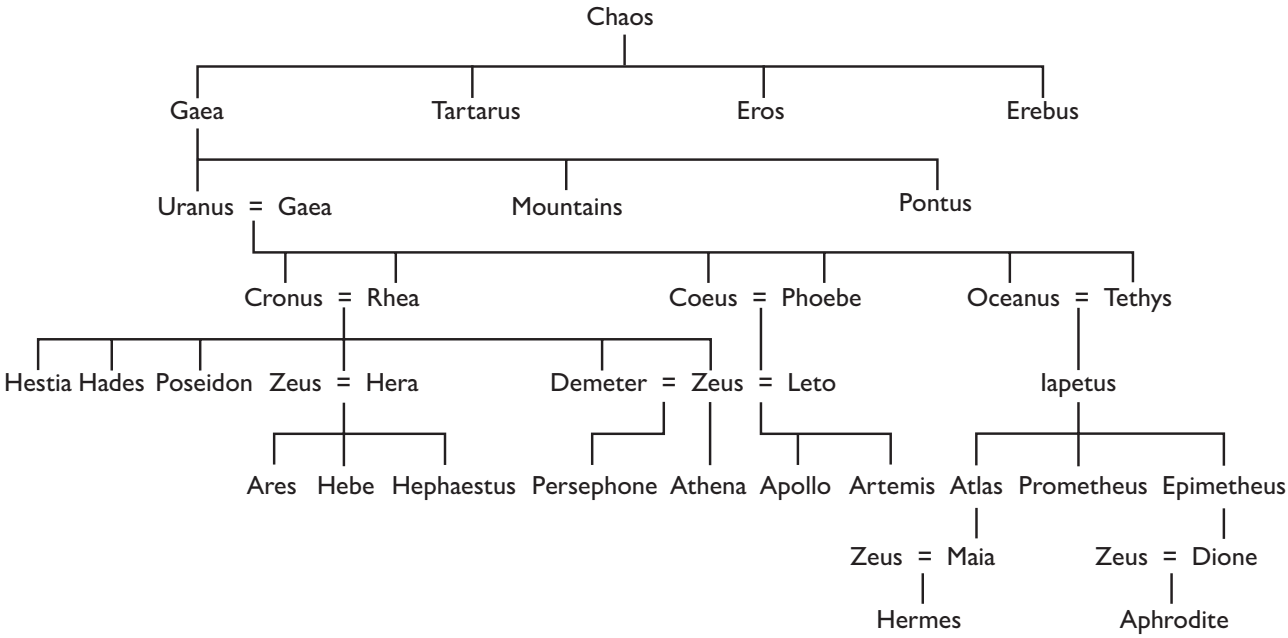

Figure 9.3 The Greek pantheon. This diagram portrays the relationships among the better-known gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon. Unlike human families, gods and goddesses are able to marry brother to sister and produce children without a mate.

community of the gods often mirrors human society—if the human society is highly hierarchical and warlike, so likewise is the society of the gods.

Specific gods are associated with the forces of nature, human fertility and the human life cycle, economic activities, and war. These specialized deities are called **attribute gods**. The relative importance of such gods depends largely on the importance of various activities within human society. For example, if a society is very warlike, the war gods may be featured prominently in religious rituals.

The gods within a pantheon have specific spheres of influence and control. Sometimes, there is a relatively small number of gods, each controlling a rather large portion of human activity, and other times, a great many gods, each highly specialized. For example, instead of a single god associated with agriculture, the Roman pantheon had a rather lengthy list of gods who were responsible for very specific activities within the farming cycle (Table 9.2).

Although a variety of gods can be listed, certain types seem to appear over and over as we move from society to society. **Creator gods** are responsible for the creation of the physical earth and the plants and animals that live on it. Creator gods can be very powerful deities and often occupy the top rung of a pantheon. Creation is not necessarily the work of a single god, however. Often, various aspects of creation are divided among several gods, or, usually after the creation of the physical earth, different gods are responsible for the creation of specific types of plants and animals or those of a particular area. This includes the creation of people.

Sometimes, the creator god creates the world and then withdraws from active interactions with the world. These **otiose gods** are too remote and uninterested in human activities to participate in the activities and fate of humans. Therefore, rituals are seldom performed to influence and ask for favors from such gods. Sometimes, these gods maintain interest in humans through lesser intermediary deities.

A common form of supernatural being found across cultures is the *trickster*. Ambiguity is one of its major characteristics, making the trickster sometimes difficult to define. Most often male, tricksters are able to transform themselves into humans, animals, and

Table 9.2 The Roman gods and goddesses of agriculture

Deity	*Responsibility*
Seia	The sprouting of the seed
Segesta	The shoots coming through the soil
Proserpina	Forms the stalks
Nodotus	Forms sections of the stem
Volutina	Forms a protective sheath around the seeds
Patelana	Later removes the sheath around the seeds
Lacturnus and Matuta	Ripening of grain (at two stages)
Flora	Makes the plant blossom

deities. The various parts of their body may detach themselves or even be severed. In some stories, the trickster is seemingly destroyed by being burned, crushed, or disemboweled—and yet he reassembles himself over and over. Often, the trickster is a creator responsible for bringing many technologies, customs, and activities into the world, such as fire, healing, and magic. Although, on the one hand, he is powerful, courageous, and creative, he can also be vindictive, selfish, cowardly, and destructive. Perhaps his two most frequently mentioned characteristics are gluttony and lust; he has a voracious appetite for food and sex, and he is always finding ways to find and steal both. Among the best-known tricksters are those of North America, such as Raven, Coyote, Hare, and Saynday, the Kiowa trickster. Anansi is the best-known African trickster (Figure 9.4).

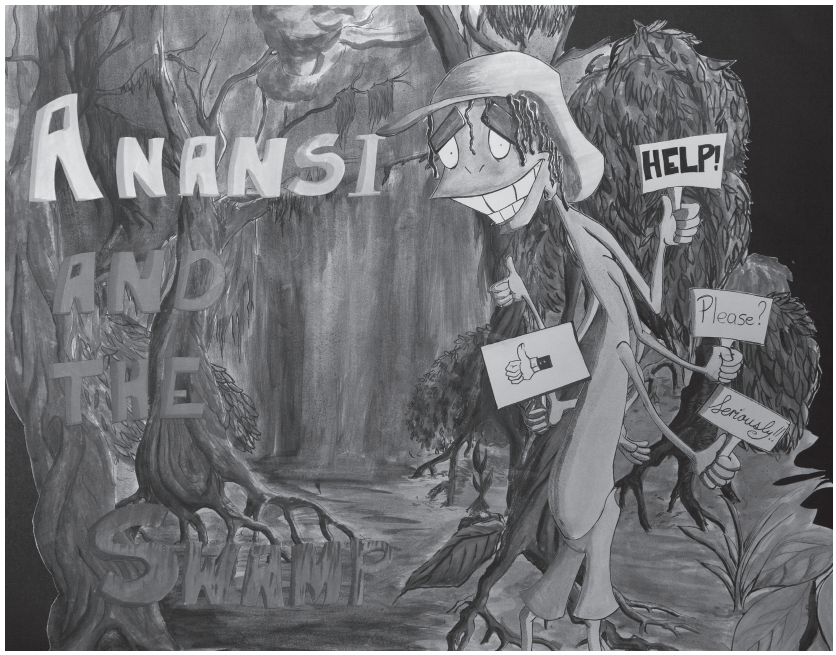

Figure 9.4 A children's drawing of Anansi the Spider from Jamaica; Anansi is known for being mischievous and causing various problems for himself and humans.

Source: Alamy

The trickster figure plays a number of roles in human societies. The stories point out human frailties through satire because the trickster represents the antithesis of what it is to be human and places human society in a position that is not always stable and predictable. Sam Gill writes,

> In Trickster is embodied the human struggle against the confinement felt by being bound to place, even with the obvious necessity of such definition in order to prevent chaos. In many of his adventures, Trickster permits people to experience the vicarious thrills and freedoms of a utopian existence. But his folly reveals the very meaning of the boundaries that give order to human life.[10]

The trickster may also find a place in situations of contact and social conflict. In !Kung San society (Khoisan culture area), the trickster is frequently seen as someone who flouts society's rules, and in many stories, the trickster finds himself interacting with the non-native, dominant population. These stories can serve as protest and resistance stories in which social situations are reversed, and the trickster outwits the dominant individual.

Gods and society

Émile Durkheim first proposed that important institutions of human society necessary for the group's survival are usually marked as sacred by religious symbolism.[11] In his analysis of gods, he points out that the powers commonly attributed to gods are similar to those of society: creating sacred times and spaces, designating moral rules, punishing offenders, socially ranking above all individuals, and requiring sacrifice. Values we learn in society, such as obligation, loyalty, respect, and hierarchy, are mirrored in our relationships with supernatural beings.

The imagery used for gods, such as their anthropomorphic nature, comes from social categories and statuses within society. Gods are rulers, fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons. We relate to them in ways we learn in society, and the concerns and interests of a particular culture will be reflected in the nature and domains of the gods. In turn, the behavior of humans toward the gods is an expression of the social behaviors valued by that culture.

Gods reflect human behavior

In a similar vein, British anthropologist Robin Horton suggests that supernatural beings function to extend the realm of social relations[12] by reflecting and modeling human behavior. He explored these ideas by looking at various African religions. Although a high god is found in almost all of these religions, the nature of this god ranges from an otiose god to one who is in active control of the universe. Horton thought that two variables explain much of this variation.

The first variable is how often people in that society encounter other peoples and the world outside their own local community. Horton thinks that lesser gods are associated with the interpretation of events occurring in the immediate area, while a high god is more important for interpreting the greater world beyond the local area. Thus, the greater the contact a society has with the larger world, the greater the need for a high god who has universal features and is associated with humanity in general rather than just with a local group.

The second variable proposed by Horton is the degree to which an individual's status in the society is *ascribed* or *achieved*. An ascribed status is one that is given to an individual based on attributes over which they have no control, such as gender and family line. Horton proposed that because an individual's status is determined solely by the community, ideas will focus on lesser gods who themselves are focused on local issues. In contrast, if the status is based on an individual's personal achievements (achieved status), the individual is, at least in part, independent from the community. Therefore, explanations of personal success and failure are more likely to reference a high god who rules over a wider realm.

Horton suggests that these variables help to explain the openness of Africa to Islam and Christianity. He correlates the arrival of missionaries in Africa with the opening up of local communities to the wider world and an increase in emphasis on achieved versus ascribed status.

Big gods

Many anthropologists have pointed out differences between living in small communities and large urban societies. Looking at the two ends of what is unquestionably a continuum

of community size and complexity, people in small communities know one another, often share biological relationships and are aware of each other's actions. It is difficult to hide antisocial behaviors in small societies, and transgressions against societal norms are usually handled informally based on issues of trust. There are few secrets in small communities.

On the other hand, large societies are essentially communities of anonymous strangers. Informal methods of social control do not work well since it is easy for strangers to hide moral transgressions from each other. This may explain the development of complex political and legal institutions, such as court and police systems, in such societies.

Psychologist Ara Norenzayan notes that gods are usually not concerned with issues of morality in small societies.[13] While gods may interact with humans and demand attention in the form of rituals and sacrifices, they do not usually reward or punish humans for their behaviors. This is in marked contrast with large, complex societies where gods, or the God of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), are very concerned with defining moral behavior and punishing transgressions of the divine moral code. Norenzayan calls such gods "*Big Gods*."

What bonds strangers in large societies is the mutual acceptance of a moral code, an important part of the religious system. God is seen as all-knowing—judging, rewarding, and punishing individual behaviors. People who accept the same belief system, perform the same rituals, and follow the same moral rules form the basis of cooperative behavior among strangers. Individuals are judged on the strength of their support for their religion. Of course, people who do not accept the same belief system are treated with suspicion. This often forms the basis of conflict between different segments of large societies.

The gods of the Yorubas

The Yorubas live in the southwestern region of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin in West Africa (Figure 9.5). Through the slave trade and, more recently, immigration, Yoruba culture has spread into the New World. Theirs is an ancient culture, and their religious concepts are found throughout a number of city-states, each associated with a particular urban center. The urban center of Ife is of special importance, for it was here that the first acts of creation were performed. It was here that Olodumare sent the gods to create the Earth.

The Yoruba cosmos is divided into two realms: Orun, heaven or sky, and Aiye, the earth, the realm of the living. Residing in Orun is the Creator Olodumare, gods known as the *orisha*, and the ancestors. Olorun is the high god and the source of all supernatural power, but he is remote from people and is not approached in rituals—an example of an otiose god. He is contacted through the intermediaries, the *orisha*.

There are a large number of *orisha*. Some are acknowledged throughout the Yoruba region, while others are associated with a particular region, village, or even family group. The *orisha* are anthropomorphic and display human emotions. Not inherently good or evil, they manifest complex behaviors and can act in a good or evil way, depending on the situation and context. The *orisha* make themselves known by possessing a devotee, who can then move and talk in a characteristic manner associated with the god. The person will also wear special clothing and be associated with certain objects. Worship of particular deities involves shrines and altars that contain specific objects placed there to

Figure 9.5 Yorubas at a celebration.
Source: Wikimedia

please the gods and show one's devotion. The *orisha* are examples of *attribute gods*. Each is approached in ritual because of a particular problem. Table 9.3 lists some of the best known of the *orisha*.

The gods of the Ifugaos

The Ifugaos are mountain-dwelling people living in western Luzon in the Philippines (Southeast Asia culture area). Studied by R.F. Barton in the early part of the twentieth century,[14] Ifugaos are well known for having a large pantheon of gods. Barton listed 1,240 deities but believed that there were as many as 1,500. These deities are grouped into 40 classes, although the classification is quite inconsistent. Yet, Ifugaos have no supreme or creator deity. Like most supernatural beings, Ifugao deities are immortal, often invisible, and are able to change their shape and transport themselves instantly through space. Although the deities can be grouped by their characteristics and powers, each does have its own specific place in the pantheon. Just as in the world of humans, the best way to get along with the gods is to bribe them. A prayer without a sacrifice is useless because the sacrifice is treated as a payment.

Table 9.3 Some of the Yoruba *orisha*

Orisha	*Domain*	*Characteristics*	*Symbolic representation*
Esu-Elegba	"Guardian of the Threshold," first god to be addressed in ritual; intermediary between people, ancestors, and gods	Unpredictable, trickster	Hooked beaded stick; red and black
Obatala	King of the orisha	Ethical, merciful, patient, composed	White sheet, white beaded cane; color white
Ogun	Rules over metal, technology, and war	Aggressive, bold	Beaded machete, metal implements; green and dark blue
Orisa Oko	Agricultural deity, judges antisocial behavior, disease, and poverty, interprets Ifa divination		Iron beaded staffs, flutes
Osanyin	Forest deity and god of herbalistic medicine		Represented as a puppet with a squeaky voice, iron staff topped with birds; colors of forest
Osoosi	Hunter god	Quick, strong, aggressive, intellectual	Hunter's hat, powder horns, bow and arrow; green, blue
Osun	Goddess of freshwater streams; sustains life	Youngest orisha, beautiful and vain, deceitful	Round fan, crown, and beaded apron; crystal yellow gold to opaque chartreuse
Sango	God of thunder and lightning	Proud, aggressive, quick-tempered	Double-bladed axe, gourd rattle, zigzag lightning motif
Yemoja	Ruler of the river Ogun, mother of many orisha, symbol of motherhood	Calm, serious, dignified	Round fan, crown; crystal white and crystal blue or green

As an example, one of the classes is translated as the "Paybackables." The name is derived from a word used for a payment in an economic exchange. Ifugaos believe that they used to have trading relations with these deities in the past and have received a great deal of their culture from the deities. This is the largest of the classes and includes a rather broad range of deities, including nature gods, deified heroes and ancestors, and technological gods. An important god in this class is Lidum, a deity who taught the Ifugaos many of their rituals.

Barton lists 168 "Paybackables." An example is the deities that are involved with the activity of weaving. They include "Separator of Seeds from Cotton," "Separator of Defective, Lumped Fibers," "Fluffer," "Spinner," "Draw Out of Thread on Spindle Bob,"

"Black Dyer," "Red Dyer," "Yellow Dyer," "Winder into Ball," "Weaver's First Helper Who Receives the Ball and Passes It Back and Forth," "Second Helper Who Passes Ball around the End Stick," "Scrutinizer (who sees that the job of setting up the loom is done right)." Notice the detailed connections with deities.

Another interesting class of deities is the "Convincers." These gods can intervene and bend a person's will if they are invoked. This process is called *convincing* by English-speaking Ifugaos. To fulfill religious obligations, an Ifugao must borrow things to sacrifice. The loan is often very difficult to repay, and the Ifugaos have developed many behaviors, including bullying and bluffing, to get the loan repaid. For example, if a debtor has publicly refused to pay a debt and, therefore, cannot pay it without losing face, the one to whom the debt is owed will call on the Convincer god Amobok, who will weaken the debtor's resolve and get him to pay back the debt in secret, thereby saving face.

There are many other important classes of deities. These include gods of reproduction, messenger deities, gods associated with various illnesses, gods associated with death, divination deities, gods of war, guardians of property, and many more.

Goddesses

Goddesses have been important figures in many religious systems. Some scholars believe that early human religions centered on fertility, a lunar cycle as opposed to a solar one, and the worship of a goddess. This is largely speculative and based on findings of small carvings of female figures with exaggerated characteristics thought to be connected to fertility (Figure 9.6).

Some believe that *goddess worship* continued in Europe until a few thousand years before the Common Era. At this time, the Indo-Europeans invaded from the East and brought with them a belief in male gods and the exploitation of nature. Some scholars argue that goddess worship and the new god worship gradually combined to produce the polytheistic pagan religions of the Romans, Greeks, and Celts.

With the development of monotheistic religions, discussed later in the chapter, the goddess was further suppressed, as these latter religions conceived of god in largely male terms. Although all three of the monotheistic religions contain some egalitarian sentiments in their origins and texts, all have also been interpreted at one time or another in very misogynistic terms.

Three important goddesses are Ishtar of the ancient Near East, Isis of ancient Egypt, and Kali in Hinduism. We will also discuss the Virgin Mary in Catholicism, although her classification as a goddess is certainly debatable. Goddess worship has also seen a resurgence with the growth of the Wiccan religion, discussed in Chapter 12.

Ishtar (ancient Near East)

The goddess Ishtar was worshipped for thousands of years in Mesopotamia. Seen as both invincible in battle and a source of fertility, Ishtar was one of the paramount national deities.

In the natural environment of Mesopotamia, winds, rain, drought, and flood were all common. This contributed to a worldview in which these inconsistencies in nature were seen as reflecting violent conflicts among the gods; both the environment and the gods were

unpredictable. The only way to ensure adequate food, victory in warfare, health, and so on was the proper performance of rituals and sacrifices for the gods and goddesses.

Among the gods and goddesses in the pantheon, Ishtar is supreme in her power over fate, as recounted in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In this story, Ishtar makes sexual advances toward King Gilgamesh, which he rejects. In response, Ishtar asks the supreme god, An, to send the bull of heaven to destroy Gilgamesh and his city, Uruk. Ishtar threatens that if she does not get her way, she will release the dead from the netherworld. In her role as a fertility goddess, she also promises that she will ensure there is enough food to eat after the bull's destruction.

Sexuality is an important aspect of Ishtar, as seen in the sacred marriage rites. The rites take place between the king and an **avatar** of Ishtar, probably her high priestess. Unlike the Egyptian pharaohs, who were themselves seen as divine, this king was considered a mortal who was the intermediary between the community and the gods. His relationship with Ishtar is seen as the source of his power and the guarantee of his success. This union is explicitly sexual, although it results not in offspring but in the fertility of the land and success in battle.

Figure 9.6 Venus of Willendorf. A prehistoric female fertility figure from an archaeological site near the town of Willendorf, Austria, dated between 24,000 and 22,000 years ago. The figure is 11.1 centimeters (4 inches) high.

Source: Retained

Isis (ancient Egypt)

Women occupied a relatively favorable position in ancient Egyptian society. The pharaoh was considered to be the son of the sun god, and his queen was not only consort to the divine king but the mother of the divine prince. Women were also important in the religious realm, the pantheon containing a number of prominent goddesses.

Isis was probably the most important deity of the Egyptian pantheon for the average Egyptian. She was called the "Great Mother" and the "Queen of Heaven" and was associated with family. Her most common representation was as a mother, suckling her son Horus on her lap. It is as the devoted wife and sister of Osiris and mother of Horus that she is best known.

Although Isis was originally closely associated with royalty, she became associated with nature as her significance grew and became diversified. Her influence spread into Rome and Greece. Around 300 BCE, the religion of Isis had developed into a **mystery religion**

that involved secret and sacred rites. One had to be initiated into the religion to gain the wisdom and salvation that the goddess could offer. The influence of Isis peaked during the third century CE, when her popularity competed with that of the Christian church.

Kali (Hinduism)

The worship of a feminine aspect of the divine has a long history in India, probably dating back to pre-Vedic ancient peoples. (The Vedas are religious texts that are the foundation of much of modern Hinduism. Written down by the middle of the first millennium BCE, they had existed in oral form much earlier.) The goddess remains important today. She is often associated with creativity and nature, particularly large trees and rivers.

The goddess is worshipped in many forms, including Durga, associated with ultimate light and benevolent power, and Kali, who is the divine in its fierce form. Kali means the "Black One," and she is depicted as dark-skinned and naked, standing on a corpse, dripping with blood, and carrying a sword and a severed head. She wears a girdle of severed hands and a necklace of skulls (Figure 9.7). Kali is said to have an insatiable thirst for blood, and in her temples, animals are beheaded as a sacrifice to her.

Despite this fierce appearance, Kali is not considered to be evil. A fearsome destroyer to those who do evil, she is a loving and compassionate mother to her devotees. In Hinduism, the divine is seen as encompassing both creation and destruction. Death and birth are linked in an endless cycle.

As such, Kali symbolizes transformation. The sword that she carries is used to cut away impediments to the realization of truth. Her garland consists of 50 severed heads representing the 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Thus, the garland represents knowledge and wisdom. The hands are the principal means by which work is done and, therefore, symbolize the action of *karma*. But in the case of Kali, the hands have been severed, showing that the binding effects of karma have been overcome. Kali blesses the devotee by cutting him or her free from the cycle of karma.

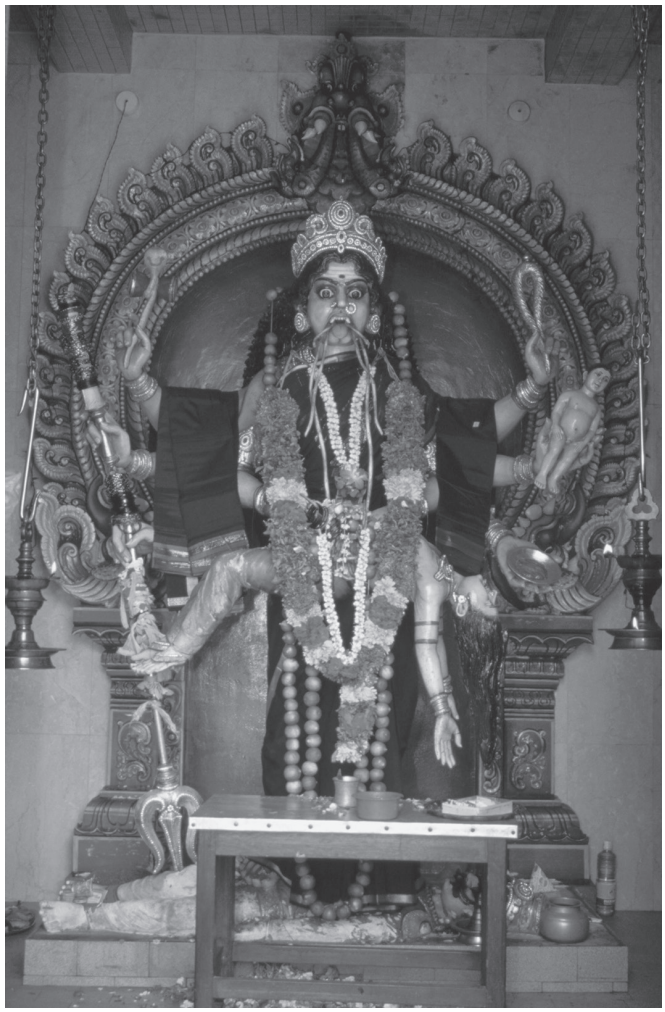

Figure 9.7 The Hindu goddess Kali. A fierce goddess, Kali destroys those who do evil but also brings wisdom and transformation to her devotees.

Source: Retained

Kali is often depicted as dancing wildly with the god Shiva, sometimes known as the Lord of the Dance, and, like Kali, potentially destructive and horrific. Some stories describe their dancing as threatening to destroy the world with its savage power. Over time, Kali became known as one of Shiva's chief spouses. In art, she is often shown standing or dancing on his naked and prostrate body. As she dances, her energy flows into him and brings him life. This image of Shiva and Kali shows Shiva as the passive potential of creation and Kali as his *Shakti*, or feminine creative principle.

Mary (Roman Catholic)

Christianity is a monotheistic religion and, from an emic perspective, does not have a goddess. However, throughout Christian history, Mary has played an important role, and devotion to her has developed in different ways.

The height of Marianist devotion (called **Marianism**) occurred during the Medieval and baroque periods in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions. Although Mary was never described as a goddess, she was held in such high esteem that she was certainly seen as more than merely a woman. She was set above the saints and, as the mother of God's son, was seen as only a little lower than God. She also played an important role as an intermediary between people and God and Jesus. This was not true of the Protestant religions, which have tended to minimize the place of Mary. In fact, devotion to Mary was one of the major issues of the Protestant Reformation.

A passage in the book of Revelation describes Mary as "a woman, clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). This woman, stepping on a serpent, is seen as symbolic of Mary overcoming the curse brought on humans by the first woman, Eve. In the language of Revelation, Mary is the "Queen of Heaven."

The importance of Mary is shown in different ways. First is the celebration, not only of the Annunciation when the Archangel Gabriel told Mary she would bear the Son of God, but also of Mary's birth and death. She is depicted in countless works of art, and many churches have been dedicated in her name. Shrines and pilgrimage sites associated with Mary were found not only in Medieval Christianity, but many continue today—pilgrimage sites at Lourdes in France, Guadalupe in Mexico, and Fátima in Portugal are all considered holy sites where an apparition of Mary occurred.

Similarities between Mary and some of the Near Eastern pagan goddesses have also been noted by scholars. (For example, Isis is also referred to as "Great Mother" and "Queen of Heaven" and is depicted seated and holding her son.) Mary shares with these goddesses the role of protector and sustainer. Some researchers think devotion to Mary possibly derives from earlier worship of the Mother Goddess. While technically Mary offers intercession for the protection of God, she is also often directly addressed through prayer. If not a goddess, Mary certainly plays an important role in the Christian understanding of God.

Monotheism: conceptions of god in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Most of the religions that we have discussed and most religions worldwide are **polytheistic;** that is, they recognize many deities. However, many people in the world today belong

to one of the large **monotheistic** (a belief in one god) religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three religions share some of the same history in addition to the concept of a single God, although today, Christianity and Islam are classified as state religions and are considered to be **proselytizing faiths**, meaning they actively seek converts.[15]

Judaism

The ultimate theme of Judaism is monotheism. Judaism believes that the Jews have been chosen by God to enter into a special relationship with Him, much like that of child to parent. However, many scholars argue that we should not assume that the earliest Jews—for example, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—were, in fact, monotheists.

The patriarchs appear to have shared many of the religious beliefs of their pagan neighbors in Canaan and might not have even shared the same god among themselves. Many different names are used for God in the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh). Some scholars argue that these were actually names of different gods. For example, the god of Abraham might have been *El*, the high god of Canaan. The name *Yahweh* is also used, and he is called the "God of our Fathers" by the Israelites. However, Yahweh might have been a different God from El.

When Moses made the **covenant** with God on Mount Sinai, the Israelites agreed to worship Yahweh alone. The covenant did not say that Yahweh is the only god who exists, although that concept developed later. Even the Ten Commandments take the existence of other gods for granted, such as in the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

Worship of a single god while ignoring the others was an unusual step in a polytheistic world. It was dangerous to ignore possible sources of supernatural power, and the Israelites were often reluctant to make this move despite the covenant. It appears that Yahweh had been a warrior god and was very helpful in such matters, but He was not seen as a specialist in other areas, such as fertility. When the Israelites settled in Canaan, they turned to the cult of Baal, the Canaanite fertility god, for such matters. It was difficult for the masculine Yahweh to replace goddesses such as Ishtar and Asherah, who still had a great following among the Israelites, especially among the women.

The Tanakh tells of how the people had become so corrupt and idolatrous that God permitted the King of Assyria to invade the country successfully. Later, Jerusalem was captured, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (586 BCE), and the people were taken to exile in Babylonia. This was an important turning point in Jewish history as they came to realize that they could practice their religion away from the Temple. From this grew the idea of a purer monotheism in which Yahweh is the only God. In many ways, the monotheism of the Jews was different from the pagan religions around it. The other gods of the ancient Middle East, such as Baal and Marduk, were not involved in the everyday lives of the people. The God of Israel, however, was an important power in human lives and was intimately involved in the ongoing history of the Jewish people. The pagan religions were generally tribal, limited to a specific people and a specific place. The God of Israel promised that he would protect Jacob and his people when they left Canaan to travel to a strange new land. This conception of God was very pragmatic.

The way in which God is characterized changes over time in the Tanakh. In the story of Abraham, God, described as an anthropomorphic being, visited Abraham in his tent and shared a meal with him. Later, God appeared to Moses in the more dramatic form of a burning bush and insisted on distance. This was followed by prophets who were visited by angelic messengers, or sometimes they heard a divine inner voice. In the later rabbinic tradition, God was presented as even more transcendent and even less anthropomorphic.

The early stories of God depict Him as a very partisan tribal deity, often cruel and violent. He initially demanded the sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac and visited horrific plagues on the Egyptians. Later, He was transformed into a symbol of transcendence and compassion, and in all three of the monotheistic religions discussed in this section, God became an inspiration for social justice.

In the years after the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 CE, the rabbis described God as an essentially subjective experience. To this day, Judaism considers theological ideas about God to be a private matter for the individual, for any official doctrine would limit the essential mystery of God. The rabbis also began the important tradition of interpretation and commentaries on religious texts. Thus, there is a fair amount of room in Judaism for individual opinions on such important matters as the nature of God.

Christianity

Out of Judaism came the new religion of Christianity. Jews at the time of Jesus, under Roman rule, were expecting a Messiah. Now passionate monotheists, they expected this Messiah to be human, a descendant of King David, not divine. The term *son of God* had been used previously in Jewish stories and expressed intimacy with God; it was not to be taken literally. Although few Jews of the time accepted Jesus as the Messiah, many other people ultimately would.

The story of Christianity is essentially the story of Jesus. The Gospel of John describes Jesus as the eternal Son of God and the word of God made flesh. Jesus himself never claimed to be divine, and it was only after his death that some of his followers came to this conclusion. This did not happen immediately. It was not until the fourth century CE that the doctrine that Jesus had been God in human form (the Incarnation) was established.

For Christians, Jesus became the mediator between humans and God. They believed that the reason God had become human, in the form of Jesus, was to lead people back to God. Salvation had been won for humans by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Therefore, salvation was to be found through faith in Jesus. Through this faith, Christians believed that they would be cleansed of their sins, made righteous, and that they would be sanctified and glorified by God in the life to come.

Ultimately, an understanding of the Christian conception of God requires an understanding of the Trinity. The Trinity begins with God, the Father, who is the creator of heaven and Earth. God became immanent in Jesus, who is God, the Son, the divine in human form. The Son is an incarnation of the Father, who returned after his physical death on Earth to live with the Father, although he remains fully present in and to his believers. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his followers after his death. The Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, is the *spirit of God*, guiding and sustaining the faithful.

The concept of the Trinity, never mentioned directly in the Bible, caused many problems for the ostensibly monotheistic Christians. Under pressure from a hostile Roman world to explain how Christians could worship three divine beings but still consider themselves monotheistic, Christians settled on an interpretation of a single divine substance manifested in three personas. This view is expressed in the Athanasian Creed: "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God." In Western Christianity, however, the three distinct personas have generally been stressed over the unifying substance.

Islam

The story of Islam begins with the story of Mohammad, a member of the Quraysh tribe, which, in the seventh century CE, had recently settled in Mecca after having previously lived as nomadic herdsmen on the Arabian steppes. This act of settling in one place drastically altered their lifestyle, and new values started replacing the old. Mecca was also the location of the Kaaba, an ancient and massive cube-shaped shrine. Most Arabs believed that the Kaaba was originally dedicated to al-Lah (Allah), the High God of the ancient Arabian pantheon.

Allah was believed to be identical to the God of the Jews and Christians. Although Judaism and Christianity are also monotheistic, both were seen as having strayed from the authentic monotheism of Abraham, which Islam would seek to restore. Abraham lived before God had sent either the Torah or the Gospel and was, therefore, seen as neither a Jew nor a Christian. In the story of Abraham, he has a son, Ishmael, by his concubine Hagar. When Abraham's wife, Sarah, becomes pregnant with Isaac, she demands that Hagar and Ishmael leave. God consoles Abraham by telling him that both of his sons will be the fathers of great nations. Abraham and Ishmael are said to have cooperatively built the Kaaba for God in Mecca.

Muslims believe that the original religion was monotheism but that it decayed at times into polytheism. At these times, God would send prophets, including Moses and Jesus, to renew the message of monotheism. Each prophet brought the message in a way appropriate to his particular time and place. The last prophet, Mohammad, was believed to have received messages meant for all people and all times.

Mohammad was visited by an angel who commanded him to recite the Word of God as it was revealed to him little by little over a period of 23 years. This would be compiled into what is called the Qur'an. The power of the Qur'an is based partly on the extraordinary beauty of the language. Muslims believe that to hear the Qur'an recited is to experience the divine.

The early verses of the Qur'an encourage people to look for signs of God's goodness and power in the world and realize how much they owe God. Muslims believe that God is **omniscient** and has created everything for a divine purpose. The world is governed by fixed laws that ensure the harmonious working of all things. Humans can find peace by knowing and living by these laws. People must reproduce God's benevolence in their own society in order to be in touch with the true nature of things. To believe in this is to surrender totally to God. An essential act in Islam is bowing down in prayer (*salat*), a gesture of surrender. In practice, these ideas mean that Muslims have a duty to create a society that is just and equitable, in which the poor and vulnerable are treated well.

The God of Islam is more impersonal than the God of Judaism. Muslims believe that God can only be glimpsed in the signs of nature and is so transcendent that He can be talked about only in parables. In contrast to Christianity, there are no obligatory doctrines about

Figure 9.8 Jain priests, ca. 1886. Notice the masks and small brooms for sweeping the path as they walk.

Source: Wikimedia

God. Theological speculation is dismissed as self-indulgent guessing. No one could possibly know or prove the nature of God.

Atheism

Just as the statement "I believe in God" has meaning only in context, so does the concept of **atheism**. For example, early Christians and Muslims were considered atheists by the larger society in which they lived for refusing to recognize the existing pantheon of gods. In the Qur'an, an unbeliever is somebody who is ungrateful to God and refuses to honor Him. Atheism has historically meant not accepting the current conception of God.

In Europe, it was only at the end of the sixteenth century that the term *atheist* began to be widely used. It was a time of great conflicts between Protestants and Catholics and the proliferation of many Christian sects. Rumors abounded of people—atheists—who denied the existence of God. These were much like the rumors of witchcraft (see Chapter 10).

In reality, atheism, as we conceive of it today, was highly unlikely—perhaps even impossible—for people of the time. In sixteenth-century life, religion and the Church were ubiquitous. They dominated life and were part of nearly every routine activity. In these conditions, it is hard to imagine someone gaining

Jains and *ahimsa*

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion in which followers seek to live a virtuous life in order to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth and karma (called ***moksha***). Virtue is defined as absolute nonviolence (***ahimsa***), which, to Jains, includes all living things, even insects and microorganisms. A devout Jain will go to great lengths to obtain virtue by wearing masks over their mouths, gently sweeping their paths as they walk forward so that they do not step on living creatures, sleeping in a straight and controlled position not to roll over and kill a living creature, and not eating animals, animal products, or root vegetables (because eating the root kills the plant). In India today, Jains make up about 0.4 percent of the population and are among the most educated and wealthy of India's citizens.[16] Today, most live in the western part of the country (Figure 9.8).

enough of an outsider perspective to question God and religion. The term *atheist* was used as an insult to describe someone who did not agree about the nature of God. No one used the term to describe themselves. It would not be until the end of the eighteenth century that a few Europeans would publicly deny the existence of God.

Scientific developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were important to the development of atheism. By the start of the seventeenth century, leading theologians argued the existence of God on entirely rational grounds. When these arguments did not hold up well under the new science, the existence of God began to be questioned. In large part, it was the way in which people conceived of the nature of God that made Him vulnerable to this attack. God at this time was seen as a fact of life that could be examined in much the same way that the natural world was.

Another issue was a new emphasis on a literal understanding of the Bible in both Catholic and Protestant traditions, making the texts vulnerable to questioning from the new scientific perspective. The heliocentric theory of Copernicus and Galileo was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church not because the theory endangered belief in God, but because it contradicted the scriptures. Many years later, the discoveries of Lyell and Darwin would call into question the biblical account of creation.

With the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment came new ideas of science and progress. Most of the philosophers of the Enlightenment did not reject the idea of God outright, though, just the conceptions of a cruel God who threatens people with eternal damnation. They believed in a god, but not the God of the Bible. However, a few people began to move away from God, and by the end of the century, there were philosophers who referred to themselves as atheists. There was also an idea that science, which was the foundation for questioning God, would ultimately replace religion. Some people believe that growing atheism is just the natural result of living in a more secular society.

Just as there are different kinds of beliefs in god, there are different kinds of atheists. Some distinguish between *weak atheism* (disbelief in any specific god) and *strong atheism* (denial of the existence of any god). Another approach is agnosticism, the idea that the question of the existence of a god is unsolvable, unprovable.

While the number of people with no belief in a god has grown dramatically in Europe over the years, it is interesting to note that the same phenomenon has not occurred as acutely in the United States. Although church attendance and membership in traditional religious denominations continue to decline, a majority of people in the United States still say that they believe in God.[17] There has also emerged in the U.S. a growing number of individuals who are labeled as **Nones**, individuals who have religious beliefs but remain unaffiliated with any congregation or religious group. This name, an etic designation, derives from the growing number of individuals choosing to mark "none" on religious surveys (see Chapter 12). As religious institutions become more enmeshed in political and social issues, the growth of Nones is predicted to continue rising.[18]

Conclusion

The functioning of the human mind leads us to see the world as populated with actors whom we see as responsible for the events in our lives, especially those that cause us pain and

misery. Some of these actors are humans with supernatural powers—magicians and witches, for example—and others are not human but are anthropomorphic supernatural beings—spirits and gods. The actions of these supernatural beings explain many things that happen and provide the basis of action to counter such negative events through ritual activity.

The similarity between gods and people is striking. Our gods resemble us in appearance, thoughts, and actions. They have human emotions and display the best and worst of human behavior. The structure of human society is a model for that of the gods in ways that are both simple and complex. Of course, the powers possessed by supernatural beings go far beyond those of humans. Gods are creators and destroyers. As such, gods are part of the explanatory system for how the world works. The existence of gods answers many of the big questions in life: How did the world begin? Why are we here? The existence of spirit beings answers many of the smaller ones: Why do we get sick? How can we be protected in our daily lives?

Summary

Gods and spirits are supernatural beings who do not originate as humans. The distinction between gods and spirits is, to some degree, arbitrary. *Spirits* are less powerful than gods, are more localized, and are frequently collections of nonindividualized supernatural beings that are not given specific names and identities. Examples include the jinn of the Middle East and the angels and demons of the monotheistic religions. Spirits include guardian spirits, ancestral spirits, and shamans' spirit helpers. Spirits live in the human world, interacting with humans, and may provide protection, success, and luck—but they also are blamed for minor mishaps. Spirits often reside in natural and human-made objects. Places of special beauty or unusual character may be inhabited by spirits.

Gods are more powerful than spirits. They control major forces of nature, such as the wind, rain, and fertility. Gods are anthropomorphic, with names, origins, and specific attributes. They are born, marry, and sometimes die; they love and lust; they are wise and dull, loving and hateful, generous and miserly; some are sympathetic to human beings, others are hostile. A hierarchy of gods makes up a *pantheon*, usually with a supreme god at the top. Many types of gods can be recognized, including creator gods, otiose gods, trickster gods, and attribute gods.

Theorists have proposed that the nature of the gods in a society mirrors important cultural elements, such as that group's social structure. Horton proposed that the importance of a high god in African religions was related to increased contact with the outside world and the importance of achieved status over ascribed status. Psychosocial anthropologists believe that humans project the qualities of important figures, such as parents, onto the gods. Psychologists also note that while gods are usually not concerned with issues of morality in small societies, gods in large, complex societies are very concerned with defining moral behavior and punishing transgressions of the divine moral code.

Some scholars believe that the earliest human religions centered on fertility, a lunar cycle as opposed to a solar one, and the worship of a goddess. Examples of goddesses are Ishtar of the ancient Near East, Isis of ancient Egypt, and Kali from Hinduism. From an etic viewpoint, the role of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism has some characteristics of a

goddess. With the development of the *monotheistic religions*, the goddess was possibly suppressed, as these religions conceived of God in largely male terms. *Polytheistic religions* recognize many deities.

The more familiar monotheistic religions believe in a single omnipotent and omniscient God. Judaism believes that the Jews have been chosen to enter into a special relationship with God. Out of Judaism came Christianity. The story of Christianity is essentially the story of Jesus—God who became human to lead people back to God. In Islam, Allah was believed to be identical to the God of the Jews and Christians, religions seen as having strayed from the authentic monotheism of Abraham, which Islam would seek to restore.

Atheism has historically meant not accepting the conception of the divine that is found in a particular society at a particular time. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that atheism took on its present meaning of denying the existence of God. Today, there is a rising group of individuals who are classified as *Nones*, those not affiliated with any religious group.

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 9.

Study questions

1. How are gods and spirits different from one another? Do they have any similarities? Use cross-cultural examples in your response.
2. As we learned in Chapter 1, the functional approach to the study of religion looks at the role that religious practices play in the functioning of a society. Apply this approach to *zar* possession in northern Sudan and explain the functional role of these beliefs.
3. In this chapter, you were introduced to the vision quests of Kiowas and other Indigenous groups. Why do you think rituals such as these are central to their culture? Do you believe there are comparable rituals like the vision quest in your own society?
4. Why do you think Catholic exorcisms have been on the rise during the last couple of decades? How might the diverse circumstances of our lives affect the way we experience religion?
5. In what ways does the concept of a monotheistic God appear in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? In regards to beliefs about their God, what do these faiths have in common, and how are they different?
6. What are the differences between agnostics, atheists, and Nones?

Notes

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16 See www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/17/6-facts-about-jains-in-india/
17 A 2022 Gallup poll found belief in God in the U.S. in 81 percent of respondents, down from 87 percent in 2017. See https://news.gallup.com/poll/393737/belief-god-dips-new-low.aspx
18 See www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/

Chapter 10

Witchcraft, sorcery, and wizardry

Cross-culturally, the belief that people can use magic to harm others is a common theme. In the West, it is common to perceive malevolent magic as conjuring, black magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. The last two terms are commonplace and have been used interchangeably by anthropologists to define the practices of individuals who bring misfortune—or death—to others. Today, most anthropologists define *witchcraft* and *sorcery* based on definitions used by E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Azandes (or Zandes) of southern Sudan in the late 1920s when they were horticulturalists living between the headwaters of the Nile and Congo rivers. Azandes identify two practices responsible for bringing harm to other persons: **witchcraft**, an inborn, unconscious propensity for evil, and **sorcery**, the manipulation of materials or words to cause harm.[1]

Anthropologist Donald Hill defines witchcraft as "the involuntary practice of magic" without any ritual paraphernalia or magical charms.[2] Witchcraft is "an inborn capacity and propensity for evil making, needing for its exercise only thought—perhaps unconscious—and no equipment or actions."[3] In many cases, someone accused of being a witch might not have anything to do with harming a person and could be unaware of such occurrences. Witchcraft accusations typically are directed towards those least likely to defend themselves, mainly women and the poor. Witchcraft can also be defined as the voluntary or involuntary intent for harm that may involve the use of physical actions, formulas, or spells; more contemporary uses of the term also involve positive intent. Today, witchcraft is not a single, unified concept, as exemplified by the rise of Wicca, a nature-based tradition of witchcraft that is a major branch of Neo-paganism and not associated with harm or evil.

Sorcery refers to "the deliberate practice of magic," oftentimes using ritual paraphernalia to harness supernatural powers to harm or kill someone.[4] Hence, the sorcerer manipulates "materials or words in order to produce an evil effect"[5] and, therefore, knows what is being done to hurt someone else. Sorcery is also seen as the intentional manipulation of power through physical objects with the intent to change something or someone (Figure 10.1).

Reading the cross-cultural literature can be confusing since *witchcraft* and *sorcery* are often used interchangeably, and scholars seldom concur with Evans-Pritchard's definitions. Moreover, people in Indigenous communities use their own terminology. For

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Figure 10.1 El mercado de las brujas (Witches' Market) in La Paz, Bolivia. Many of the items sold in this market are for sorcery and wizardry.

Source: Alamy

instance, Kiowas, Zunis, or Navajos might say someone was "witched" when actually they were victimized by a sorcerer. Although people in different cultures use their own terms to describe acts of evil (emics), anthropologists usually adhere to Evans-Pritchard's definitions (etics). Nevertheless, distinguishing between witchcraft and sorcery is often problematic.

Anthropologists John Middleton and Edward Winter suggested using **wizardry** as a cover term that accounts for both witchcraft and sorcery when it is difficult to distinguish between the two. One aspect of wizardry is the belief that when magic is practiced in private (and not publicly), something is amiss.[6] Witchcraft and sorcery are often practiced in private.

Although witchcraft and sorcery evoke negative connotations, anthropologist Beatrice Whiting conducted fieldwork with Paiutes in Oregon and learned that wizardry accusations could also serve to enforce social norms.[7] Because people fear wizardry accusations for being deviant or acting against societal norms, they comply with the norms of the overall society. Conformity in small-scale societies, therefore, is maintained without the need for formal political structures or societal institutions. Alice and Irvin Child identify seven social attributes of wizardry:[8]

1. **Social Control**—Wizardry accusations are generally made against those who are considered deviant. This fear of accusation often keeps people in line, thereby bringing about conformity within a community. This is often found in small-scale societies that do not have institutions such as police forces to enforce social control. For example, anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn noted that among the Navajos, accusations were consistently made against the wealthiest individuals, thereby serving as a social-leveling device.[9] A Navajo saying sums this up: "A man who has died wealthy hasn't cared for his family."
2. **Redirecting Aggression within the Group**—Kluckhohn's example demonstrates how people show hostility towards those who control wealth, thereby keeping some from amassing too much wealth. In other societies, the wealthy may be exempt from witchcraft accusations, yet kings and leaders often feel hostility turned towards them, compelling them to direct it towards other groups, as in the case of the European witchcraft craze between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Anthropologist Marvin Harris contends that the witch mania functioned to shift blame for social problems in late Medieval society from Church and State to the peasantry. Blaming the peasantry led to half a million people being burned at the stake or executed using a variety of grotesque methods.[10]
3. **Segmentation of the Community**—Anthropologists working in African societies noted that when communities or social units became too large and conflicted because they exceeded the carrying capacity of the environment, accusations and counteraccusations of wizardry emerged, leading to fission and the formation of smaller, tighter knit social groups. Harmony was then restored in the smaller groups. Occurrences of rupture and smaller groupings were documented among the Leles of Zaire, Wambuagwes of Tanzania, and Gusiis of Kenya.
4. **In-Group versus Out-Group**—As seen in some Melanesian societies, wizardry accusations may be directed against outside groups, usually neighboring tribes. This helps facilitate tribal cohesion by displacing fears and hatred toward outside groups. New Zealand anthropologist Reo Fortune noted that Dobuans were an exception, as they feared wizards in their own communities.[11]
5. **Maintaining Social Structure**—In some instances, wizardry is seen as making an ambiguous or incompatible social structure more tolerable. For instance, the clan system among the Pondos of South Africa demands strict loyalty to the descent group. Rules of *clan exogamy*—one must marry outside the social group—make it impossible to marry within the father's and mother's clans, so most women in the immediate vicinity are sexually unavailable to young men, who have to find their wives in other villages. To draw attention away from the young women in the immediate community, those men who seem to suffer from sexual desire are accused of wizardry. Thus, attention is directed towards their evil desires and not the problem itself.
6. **Restoring Social Equilibrium**—When a society has become disorganized because of rapid cultural change, wizardry can help restore equilibrium because accusations of wizardry set in motion the steps that will restore harmony within the group. Kiowa sorcery (see further on) and power contests reached a peak between 1875 and the 1920s when the majority of Kiowas converted to Christianity.

7. **Supporting the Worldview**—Wizardry also helps societies "by providing support for accepted views of the social and physical world, views that work well enough to be worth sustaining and might be threatened by unexplained failure of confirmation."[12] When actions that are normally successful are ineffective, failure can be attributed to evil meddling through wizardry, not a flaw in the belief system. Hence, conventional wisdom is not threatened. This provides a sense of predictability in that one can explain the presence of evil while suggesting a course of action to undo or forestall it. In Christian beliefs, evil is attributed to the Devil, who influences deviant individuals who harbor malintent toward others—the Gusiis of Kenya believe the opposite, that spirits are consistently good because humans cause evil.

Wizardry, therefore, is a term that *includes* witchcraft and sorcery. People in many cultures either fear being victimized by wizards or being subjected to accusations of wizardry. Those accused may face execution, ostracism, or even a rise in prestige.

Witchcraft among the Azandes

The Azandes (Congo culture area) are a large cultural group living in southern Sudan and northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). Between 1926 and 1930, the British anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard made three expeditions to Zandeland, which were the basis for his ethnography *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*.[13] Among the Azandes, witchcraft is an everyday topic of conversation, and people will discuss witchcraft in great detail with an outside observer. Therefore, Evans-Pritchard had access to a great deal of information, something far more difficult in many other societies.

The Zande belief in witchcraft

Azandes believe that witchcraft, or *mangu*, is something that exists within the physical body of a witch. Azandes actually *describe mangu* as a physical substance. For example, it might be "an oval blackish swelling . . . in which various small objects are sometimes found."[14] It appears to be associated with the intestines or perhaps the liver. And how are Azandes able to describe witchcraft substances as human organs? In the days before British colonialism, at death, the Azandes performed an autopsy on people who had been accused of witchcraft to determine whether they were truly witches or not.

However, because witchcraft is inherited, an autopsy of an accused witch would also prove that a particular living person related to the deceased was or was not a witch. *Mangu* is thought to be passed down from parent to child of the same sex—from father to son and from mother to daughter. Therefore, if a man were proven to possess witchcraft substance, this conclusion would extend to that man's father, sons, brothers, and so on. However, Azandes rarely have a theoretical interest in witchcraft. What is important is whether a person at a particular point in time is *acting* as a witch toward a specific person. A person can possess *mangu* and yet not act as a witch. (Identification of witches is commonly done through divination.)

Although witchcraft is contained within the physical body, its action is psychic. The psychic aspect of *mangu* is the soul of witchcraft. It most often leaves the physical body of the

witch at night and is directed by the witch into the body of a sleeping victim. As it moves, it shines with a bright light that can be seen by anyone during the nighttime. However, during the day, it can be seen only by religious specialists.

All types of misfortune that are not clearly caused by some other factor are attributed to witchcraft. This includes accidents, illness, and death but also economic misfortunes such as the loss of a crop or the failure of a technological operation. Although there are methods for dealing with witchcraft, it is only in the case of death that there is a demand for compensation from the witch, the killing of the witch, often through sorcery, or the execution of the witch by the legal authority. These latter consequences occurred only for witches who had been held responsible for many deaths.

Witchcraft accusations are based on real social tensions that exist in Zande society. Witches are never strangers. Accusations grow out of negative emotions and behavior, such as greed, envy, and hatred. Certain social relationships within Zande society are common breeding grounds for such emotions, and this is reflected in the pattern of witchcraft accusations. For example, Azandes practice *plural marriage*, and the relationship between co-wives is often cordial. Yet tension may develop between them, especially if the husband favors one wife over another or one wife is jealous of the other.

The role of divination

Zande oracles were described in Chapter 7. The best known are *dakpa*, the termite oracle; *iwa*, the rubbing-board oracle; and *benge*, the poison oracle.

A case of suspected witchcraft might begin by consulting *dakpa* because it is a relatively simple and inexpensive form of divination that can be performed by non-specialists. If *dakpa* suggests that witchcraft is responsible, a specialist would be consulted to use *iwa*, the rubbing-board oracle. Not only do these oracles provide information and suggest courses of action (including herbal remedies and the performance of therapy rituals), but it is thought that if the witch learns that someone is trying to determine the cause of the illness, the witch might stop so as not to risk being accused.

If all of the steps fail to stem the tide of the illness, however, *benge* will be consulted. If there is confirmation that witchcraft is indeed the cause, the operator of the benge oracle must identify the witch. A witch is always someone known to the victim, and the cause of a witchcraft attack is usually associated with antisocial behavior. In choosing names to place before the oracle, one would select those people in the community who exhibit antisocial behavior because there is a probability that one of them is the witch. Because antisocial behavior tends to occur frequently in stressful social relationships, accusations tend to be associated with particular relationships.

Once the witch has been identified through the poison oracle, a neutral intermediary confronts the witch, who invariably claims innocence. However, according to Zande witchcraft belief, it is possible to possess *mangu* (witchcraft substance), which might be acting up without the accused person's conscious knowledge. This gives the accused person a way out. They can perform a simple ritual in which they take water into their mouth and spit it out, thereby "cooling" their witchcraft. If the victim gets better, then *benge* is praised for identifying the witch, and the witch does not suffer any stigma. If the victim

continues to be ill, however, then either the accused person was not sincere in cooling down their witchcraft, or they did indeed stop, but then another witch started.

An analysis of Zande witchcraft beliefs

Evans-Pritchard wrote that

> the concept of witchcraft . . . provides [Azandes] with a natural philosophy by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained and a ready and stereotyped means of reacting to such events [provided]. Witchcraft beliefs also embrace a system of values, which regulate human conduct.[15]

All peoples seek explanations for things that happen in the world, especially misfortune. It is in this arena that people frequently turn to supernatural causes, such as spirits, sorcery, or witchcraft. Azandes think of all misfortune as being due to some supernatural agency.

Evans-Pritchard describes the case of a fallen granary. These structures are built on stilts to keep wild animals from getting in and eating the grain. The shade of the granary is an important meeting place where people congregate during the heat of midday. After the harvest, the weight of the grain stored in the granaries is substantial, and in Zandeland, there are a great many termites. Although the men carefully examine the pillars and replace damaged ones before each harvest, it is still possible that termites will weaken the stilts and the granary will fall. If people are sitting under the structure when it falls, they may be seriously injured.

The immediate explanation for the accident is quite simple: termite-weakened wood stilts could not bear the weight of the grain, and the granary collapsed. Yet Azandes explain this course of events as an example of witchcraft. The key question here is not, "Why did the granary collapse?" but "Why were these particular individuals sitting under this particular granary when it collapsed?" The answer is witchcraft. To most Westerners, the fact that these two events occurred at the same time—certain people sitting under the granary and the collapse of the granary—is simply coincidence or bad luck. However, Azandes do not accept the concept of coincidence. The fact that these specific individuals were injured is explained as witchcraft.

Because of this way of thinking about cause and effect, witchcraft becomes a good explanation for misfortune. Anti-witchcraft rituals and the identification of the witch provide a plan of action, or what Evans-Pritchard calls "a ready and stereotyped means of reacting to such events."[16] However, witchcraft cannot be used as an excuse for incompetence or simply bad behavior. If a particular activity fails because the person is not skilled, it is not witchcraft.

Witchcraft among the Zunis

In 1881, anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing accompanied a Zuni delegation to Washington, D.C., which afterward toured the East Coast. Upon visiting Salem, Massachusetts, the Zunis voiced their approval of the 1692 witch trials in which nineteen citizens accused of witchcraft—14 women and five men—were hanged. Their proclamation was published in the Boston *Herald*, which undoubtedly shocked New Englanders, but to

Zunis, witchcraft was a capital offense, a notion ingrained in their culture as demonstrated by their first encounter with Spaniards.[17]

In 1539, Estevanico, a Moor from Morocco, guided the Marcos de Niza expedition into Zuni territory in search of the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola. Eleven years earlier, Estevanico and three Spaniards had survived the ill-fated Pánfilo de Narváez expedition that shipwrecked off the Florida coast. After wandering across the Texas coastline and the deserts of the Southwest for eight years before reaching Mexico City, Estevanico's knowledge of Native cultures and the terrain was indispensable to de Niza's incursion. In March 1539, Estevanico's advance party arrived outside the village of Hawikku, "Gum Leaves," where he was killed by Zunis a few days later (Figure 10.2). One version of the story states that he demanded turquoise and women, yet another suggests he was perceived to be a black version of Chakwena Okya, an evil warrior woman who carried her heart in a rattle. Several days before his death, Estevanico had sent ahead "his gourd with a few strings of rattles, a white feather and a red feather, together with a message that he was coming to cure the sick." Estevanico probably obtained the rattle—used for dancing and curing—from Indians in Texas during the ill-fated Narváez expedition.[18] Zuni legend specifies that Estevanico's body was quartered and scattered in the four directions.

Cushing lived in Zuni Pueblo between 1879 and 1884, where he was adopted by the tribe and became a Bow Priest (see Chapter 6). Through participant observation, he learned about the activities of "wizards and sorcerers" in the pueblo. According to Cushing, wizards made effigies or fashioned prayer sticks with owl feathers, then placed them in the pathway of the victim. Those suspected of wizardry were forced to confess. If not, their arms were bound behind their backs, and they were suspended over the projecting roof beam of a house or the mission church until they recanted. Oftentimes, suspected wizards were blamed for droughts or excessive rain that damaged crops.[19]

Figure 10.2 Hawikku, the largest of six Zuni villages in 1539 when first visited by Estevanico.
Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

During Cushing's stay, a man named Big Belly was tried, then exiled, for causing a windstorm that spread sand dunes over springs and fields. Another man, Bat, confessed to poisoning his niece and causing a prolonged drought. Though he was freed, Bat was never seen again, for Cushing believed that the priests secretly executed him. In 1894, Zuni Nick was accused of a smallpox epidemic and winds that damaged peach orchards. Sentenced to death by the priests, he was hanged over the church beam until his screams prompted the Indian trader in the village to rescue him and take him to nearby Fort Wingate for protection. Torturing and executing wizards ceased shortly afterward due to threats of imprisonment, though witchcraft accusations continued through the 1940s when numerous people died from a mysterious illness.[20] Today, visitors to the pueblo are admonished not to wander outside after dark lest they be suspected of being witches.

Sorcery among the Fores

The Fores of New Guinea believe that the disease *kuru* is caused by sorcery (Chapter 1). The sorcerer steals food remnants, hair, nail clippings, or excrement from the victim. He makes a bundle with leaves and some sorcerer's stones and places the bundle in cold, muddy ground. He then beats the bundle with a stick and calls the victim's name, reciting the following spell: "I break the bones of your arms, I break the bones of your hands, I break the bones of your legs, and finally I make you die."[21] The location of the bundle in cold, muddy ground suggests the deep chill felt by *kuru* patients. The use of something from the victim, such as hair, is an example of contagious magic (Chapter 7). The Fores attempt to prevent *kuru* by attempting to deprive the sorcerer of the materials he needs. Much day-to-day behavior involves hiding hair clippings, parings, feces, and food scraps. (Similar to the practice of the Fores, in the Andes, wizards create *mesas*—sorcery bundles—that can be buried or burned in order to effect a change in a person or place. Andean people are also very careful to hide or destroy bodily exudations or clippings. See Figure 10.3.)

Figure 10.3 *Mesas* in an Andean market. These are sold as sorcery bundles and may be buried or burned to create a change in a person or place.

Source: Alamy

The Fores recognize many diseases, some of which correspond to diseases recognized by Western medicine. They are usually seen, though, as the result of sorcery. Many magical techniques use materials that were once in

contact with the victim, as in *kuru*, but some add special poisons that are placed where the victim will make contact with them, such as on a trail. In *nankili*, or pleurisy (a lung condition), the sorcerer makes bone needles out of the bones of pigs, cassowary, or possums. He blows smoke on the bone needles to make the needles magically fly into the victim's body.

Kiowa sorcery

Nineteenth-century Kiowas also believed that many illnesses were caused by sorcery. Shamans were greatly feared, especially those possessing strong *dɔdɔ*, or "power," for everyone knew that all powers are dichotomously good and bad. People were careful not to offend shamans, but conflicts were unavoidable; if a man angered another person with *dɔdɔ*, he expected to get sick. Sorcerers always knew the restrictive taboos of their adversaries. Using this knowledge, they employed **shooting magic** to inject their victims with poison. Kiowas strongly believed that "what comes around, goes around" and that, ultimately, a sorcerer would die because of his practices. Moreover, close family members were also vulnerable to any reversal of his magic.

The standard "bewitching" procedure was to draw an outline of the intended victim on the ground. Placing a needle, small feather, grass blade, or other object into a pipestem, the sorcerer blew or "shot" it at the body part to be afflicted. Besides "shooting" poison into the victims, a sorcerer could also harm an enemy by merely pointing at him and saying certain words. He could also aim a painted bone toward the person and breathe on it, causing the bone to disappear in the victim's body.

Once a person became ill, he could often identify the antagonist by observing the suspect's behavior. Either the sorcerer avoided him, or he treated him with unusual kindness. The only way to bring about recovery from sorcery was to approach the sorcerer and force him to rescind the spell at gunpoint if necessary. One could also find a shaman with stronger powers to reverse the magic and send it back. Sorcery victims consulted other shamans to identify the aggressor through divination rituals. Placing a black handkerchief over his eyes, the shaman "examined" the patient to determine if sorcery was, in fact, responsible for the illness. If so, he could usually name the sorcerer who was accountable. Employing the *sucking technique*, he drew out the poison, spitting it into a fire, thereby destroying the spell. Recurrent symptoms often meant that the sorcerer was still "witching" the patient, which often culminated in power contests between the rival shamans. Ultimately, the most powerful shaman won (see Chapter 7).[22]

Euro-American witchcraft beliefs

Although Euro-American ideas about witchcraft show some similarities to those of small-scale societies, there are many important differences. Both cultures see witches as evildoers, but ideas of witchcraft in Europe were influenced by Christian ideas about the nature of evil.

One of the theological challenges facing Christianity (as well as Judaism and Islam) is how to explain the existence of evil when God has been described as unique, all-powerful, and all-good. One answer to this problem posits the existence of an evil spirit of great power. In Hebrew, this spirit was called Satan, the adversary. This was translated into Greek as *diabolos* and in English as the Devil. Satan is not a major figure in the Hebrew Bible; however, he did receive a great deal of attention in Judaism during the Apocalyptic

period (200 BCE to 150 CE), a time during which Jews were focused on the idea of an imminent apocalypse and the coming of the Messiah. However, from that time on, the rabbis came to dominate Judaism, and Satan received very little attention.

One important event during the apocalyptic period was the origin of Christianity; the New Testament prominently features Satan. The message of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ saves his followers from the power of the Devil. Part of the new definition of the evil of witchcraft is that witches are individuals who have made a pact with the Devil.

The connection with pagan religions

We said earlier that in small-scale societies, the concepts of witchcraft and sorcery are quite distinct. This will change with European witchcraft beliefs, in which sorcery gets bound up with witchcraft—thus our common perception of witches doing spells. There were also important changes in the conception of sorcery. Previously, sorcery had been seen as largely mechanical, a manipulation of the supernatural. Now, sorcery has become associated with the invocation of spirits. Although sorcery had always been an antisocial behavior and was seen as a hostile act, sorcery was now defined as also being hostile to God. The spirits of sorcery were defined as *demons*. Therefore, anyone doing sorcery, or for the most part any magic, was seen as calling upon the servants of Satan.

Some have argued that this was part of the larger persecution of **pagan** religious practices. Christians argued that Jesus was the Son of God, and a large part of their argument was based on the miracles that he performed. Skeptics of the day were likely to counter with the argument that Jesus was merely another sorcerer performing magic. So, for Christians, the only legitimate magic became the magic performed by Jesus; all other magic was the work of the Devil. Magic and witchcraft became not just crimes against society but **heresy**—crimes against God.

The Christian theology of the time argued that pagan magic and religion were all the work of the Devil, part of his plan to lure people away from the truth of Christianity. The pagan gods and goddesses were thus redefined by Christians as servants of Satan. However, at the level of *popular religion* (religion of the "people"—at the local level), many pagan beliefs and gods were absorbed into the Christian religion.

The nature of the Catholic Church's response to heresy underwent dramatic changes during this time. Beginning in the twelfth century, laws dealing with heresy became more severe. A factor in this state of affairs was the revival of Roman law. Under Roman law, people are seen as part of the State and subject to its principles. In the late Roman Empire, several codes had declared that crimes against God were worthy of punishment by death. The revival of Roman law encouraged the imposition of harsher penalties for heresy. For example, burning became the punishment of choice for relapsed heretics and was increasing in frequency. Witches, as heretics, were burned as well. However, from the fifteenth century onward, witches were treated even more harshly than other heretics. Most heretics were burned only in the case of relapse; witches were burned on a first conviction.

Before the thirteenth century, the only way for a heretic to be brought to trial was if an individual made an accusation against that person. It was not long, though, before bishops began holding **Inquisitions** or trials in the Roman Catholic court of formal investigations of acts against the Church. Instead of waiting for an accusation, the authorities began

to seek out heretics actively, particularly witches. By the end of the thirteenth century, inquisitors were assigned to most areas of continental Europe.

At the beginning, most sentences appear to have been penances such as wearing a cross sewn to one's clothes or going on a pilgrimage. The goal of the inquisitor was primarily to identify the guilty and get them to confess and repent in order to restore them to the Church. Only a small number of the cases resulted in execution. These were generally reserved for relapsed heretics or obstinate heretics (those who refused to repent). In time, though, the punishments, especially for witches, became more severe.

Inquisitions were a powerful means of enforcing sanctions against heretics and witches. At first, individual bishops were encouraged in their efforts, but between 1227 and 1235, the papal Inquisition was established. The power of the Inquisition was constantly being corroborated and expanded. For example, in 1252, Innocent IV issued the papal bull *Ad Extirpanda*. This bull (decree) authorized the imprisonment of heretics, the seizure of their possessions, and their imprisonment, torture, and execution. These punishments were usually based on minimal evidence. The procedures of the Inquisition were such that guilt was easy to establish and innocence was difficult to defend.

The Witchcraze in Europe

At the end of the Middle Ages, witches were believed to be individuals, both male and female, who had formally repudiated Christianity and made a "pact" with the Devil. Witches were believed to ride by night and to have secret nocturnal meetings. As we saw with witchcraft in small-scale societies, witches generally represent all that is evil and antisocial. In this case, witches were believed to have orgies, to engage in sacrificial infanticide and cannibalism, and to desecrate Christian holy objects, such as the crucifix and the **Eucharist**.

The period known as the Witchcraze began at the end of the Middle Ages (around 1450) and lasted for about 200 years. Many scholars date the start of the Witchcraze to the time at which the Inquisition began actively seeking out witches. Although people associate this with the "Dark Ages," it actually was a product of the Renaissance and Reformation in Europe. During the Witchcraze, many people were accused, convicted, and executed as witches. The exact number of victims is unknown, but estimates range from a few thousand to several million people.

In the 1450s, the invention of the printing press contributed to the Witchcraze. One of the most important books published during this time was the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or the *Hammer against Witches*, by German Inquisitor Heinrich Kramer in 1487. The *Malleus* spells out the Church's beliefs about witches at the time. Witches were people who renounced the Catholic faith and devoted themselves, body and soul, to the service of evil. Witches offered unbaptized children to the Devil and engaged in orgies that included having intercourse with the Devil himself. Witches were also typically believed to shift shapes, fly through the air, and make magical ointments. The *Malleus* also stated that witches were more likely to be women than men, something we will return to later. The *Malleus* spelled out what to do with a witch: All witches must be arrested, convicted, and executed. It is important to note that even people who spoke out against the Witchcraze did not challenge the actual existence of witches. To do so at this time would have been tantamount to declaring oneself an atheist.

People who were accused of witchcraft were interrogated to obtain a confession. The questions they were asked presumed their guilt. For example, common questions included where and when they met with the Devil. The question of whether or not they had done such a thing was never asked. Torture was a common means of gaining a confession, and in 1628, a man named Johannes Junius was executed as a witch. What is unusual about this case is that he was able to smuggle a letter out of prison to his daughter before he died. What follows is a portion of that letter:

> Many hundred thousand good-nights, dearly beloved daughter Veronica. Innocent have I come into prison, innocent have I been tortured, innocent must I die. For whoever comes into the witch prison must . . . be tortured until he invents something out of his head . . . When I was the first time put to the torture, Dr. Braun, Dr. Kötzendörffer, and two strange doctors were there. The Dr. Braun asks me, "Kinsman, how come you here?" I answer, "Through falsehood, through misfortune." "Hear you," he retorts, "you are a witch; will you confess it voluntarily? If not, we'll bring in witnesses and the executioner for you." I said, "I am no witch, I have a pure conscience in the matter; if there are a thousand witnesses, I am not anxious." [The witnesses were brought forward.] And then came also—God in the highest heaven have mercy—the executioner, and put the thumb-screws on me, both hands bound together, so that the blood ran out at the nails and everywhere, so that for four weeks I could not use my hands, as you can see from the writing . . . Thereafter, they first stripped me, bound my hands behind me, and drew me up in the [strappado]. Then I thought heaven and earth were at an end; eight times did they draw me up and let me fall again, so that I suffered terrible agony . . . And so I made my confession . . . but it was all a lie.[23]

As the sixteenth century progressed, the Witchcraze only increased in intensity. Religious conflict, popular movements, and wars during the Reformation exacerbated social tensions, which were then reflected in witchcraft accusations. The Witchcraze did not decline until the late 1600s and early 1700s.

The Witchcraze in England and the United States

The Witchcraze in England was at first somewhat different from that in continental Europe. England had no Inquisition, no Roman law, and only a weak tradition of heresy—all of which had contributed to the Witchcraze elsewhere. There was no English translation of the *Malleus Maleficarum* until modern times. English witchcraft remained closer to the idea of sorcery, with an emphasis on the power of witches to place hexes and curses. In the 1500s, English witches were not believed to fly, conduct orgies, or make pacts with the Devil. Instead, they harmed livestock, caused diseases, and hurt infants and children. The first statutes against witchcraft in England were not passed until the mid-1500s. Even then, witches were prosecuted under civil, not religious, law. This is why witches in England and later in the United States were hanged and not burned (Figure 10.4). Burning was the punishment for heretics.

Ideas more like those on the European continent eventually made their way into England through Scotland and King James I, who was a major proponent of the Witchcraze. The height of the Witchcraze in England occurred during the 1640s. The English Civil War at the time produced even greater anxieties and insecurities. America lagged further behind;

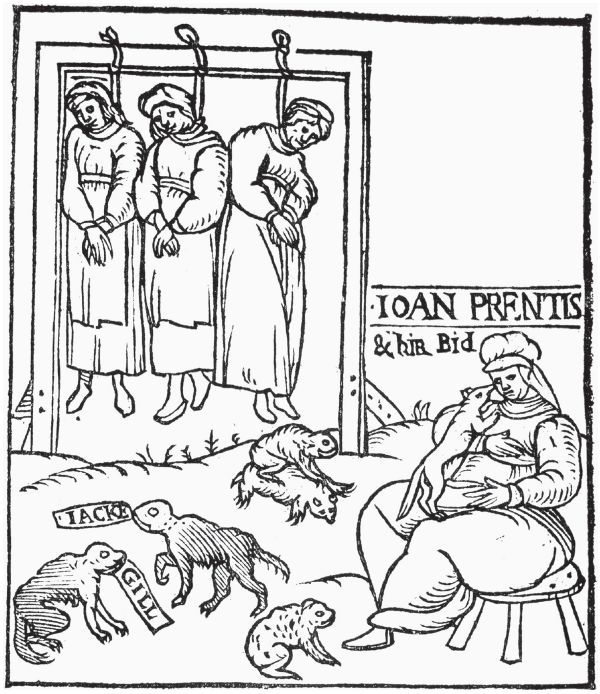

Figure 10.4 Execution of English witches. Three English witches are seen hanging in this woodcut from a contemporary pamphlet on the third Chelmsford witch trial of 1589.

Source: Retained/EDITED

the first hanging of a witch in New England did not occur until 1647.

By far, the most famous witch trials in the Americas occurred in Salem in 1692. This trial is well documented and has been extensively studied. The immediate cause of the trials appears to have been two young girls (ages nine and 11) who were experimenting with divination techniques in an attempt to discover who their future husbands would be. In the process, they managed to scare themselves and began exhibiting nervous symptoms. They thrashed around and assumed odd postures. The father of one of the girls was Samuel Parris, the local minister. He called in a physician to examine the girls, but the doctor was unable to find anything wrong. It was this physician who first suggested that the girls might be victims of a witch's spell.

The girls' behavior became worse, and soon, other young girls and young women also began to suffer from fits and convulsions. The girls were questioned, and they named three women as witches: Sarah Goode, Sarah Osborne, and a West Indian slave named Tituba. Soon, more were accused. The fits increased in intensity. The girls screeched, howled, reported visions, and suffered from mysterious tooth marks. The trials themselves were dramatic affairs in which the girls exhibited these symptoms. In all, 19 people were executed, and more than 100 were jailed.

Most of the commentaries on the Salem trials focus on what, from an outsider's perspective, were causes. Early suggestions included the girls being delusional and the whole thing being a vicious prank. Perhaps they enjoyed the attention, or maybe they were overcome by the power of suggestion. More recent research has suggested a possible biological component in the form of ergot poisoning. Ergot poisoning comes from eating a particular mold found in the rye grain, a common food source at the time, and hallucinations are one of the symptoms.

Regardless, the events that took place in Salem, like many cases of witchcraft, were understood in a social context, from the ebb and flow of everyday activities of people that characterize living in a community. Witchcraft accusations were the end result of stressful social relationships as well as situations arising from the politics, economics, and religious practices of the community.

Tituba

One of the first women to be accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts (1692–1693) was an enslaved woman named Tituba. She was owned by Samuel Parris, the minister in Salem village and the father of one of the first "victims" of witchcraft. It is believed that she was brought to the U.S. from Barbados, and some scholars claim she may have had cultural roots in the Arawak peoples of northern South America and the Caribbean. Tituba potentially had knowledge of Caribbean Vodou, which may explain some of the **occult** techniques of which she was accused and perhaps even a source for the behaviors that Parris' daughter exhibited in her "nervous fit."

Salem was not a solitary community. It was a farming society at the edge of the settled world at that time. In the not-too-distant past, before the period of the witchcraft trials, Salem had experienced conflict with the local Native population, the Naumkeag band of the Pawtucket tribe. By the time of the trials, Salem was a rapidly growing community, one that included an extensive hinterland, and as the population grew, so did pressures on the land. In fact, many neighborhoods of the town were petitioning the colonial government for status as independent villages.

As is common in many societies throughout the world, those accused of witchcraft were primarily people living on the fringes of society. Many were marginalized and powerless women without husbands, brothers, or sons to protect their interests. Others were those who dealt with folk remedies and midwifery. "When such remedies went bad, and when face-to-face dispute resolution failed, the customers who paid for the cures or the potions might conclude that the purveyor was at fault. Thus premodern malpractice became witchcraft."[24]

Functions of Euro-American witchcraft beliefs

Many of the functions that we discussed for small-scale societies are applicable here. Witches define all that is wrong and immoral. People who exhibit antisocial behavior or who stand out in any way are the most likely targets of witchcraft accusations. In the European example, witches helped to define the boundaries of Christianity and the cohesion of the Christian community. Witches were people who turned their backs on Christianity and made a pact with the Devil. They were heretics—people who sinned against God.

Witches also fulfill our unconscious need to blame someone for the misfortunes that we experience in our daily lives. It is more psychologically satisfying to have an identifiable individual who can be blamed and punished than to shrug our shoulders and attribute misfortune to bad luck. In general, patterns of witchcraft accusations also reflect deeply felt conflicts and divisions in a culture. The studies have shown this to be true for Salem, for example. Deeply felt moral divisions over the governance of the church, along with neighborhood and family conflicts, were showcased in the Salem witch trials.

Witches as women

Although both men and women were tried and executed as witches during the Witchcraze, many more women were killed than men. There are many reasons for this. First, the *Malleus Maleficarum* itself says that women are more likely to be witches. This is because, according to the *Malleus*, women are weaker, less intelligent, more superstitious, and more sensual than men. The *Malleus* tells us:

> All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman . . . What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted in fair colours . . . The word woman is used to mean the lust of the flesh, as it is said: I have found a woman more bitter than death, and a good woman more subject to carnal lust . . . There are more superstitious women found than men. And the first is, that they are more credulous; and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them [than men].[25]

Beliefs about witches included intercourse with the Devil. During a witch's interrogation, she was asked to name demons that had been her lovers and to describe the Devil's phallus. The fact that the Devil is almost universally perceived as male might also have been a major factor in labeling women as witches.

Sixteenth-century Europe was unusually *misogynistic*. Some historians have suggested that this was due to demographic changes. More men than women died from plague outbreaks and warfare, resulting in a demographic imbalance, with more women living alone than usual. The social position of a woman living alone in a patriarchal society in which women were defined in relation to men would have been difficult. The weaker social position of women made it easier for them to be accused. Another demographic change that likely had an impact was the increasing movement from the countryside to life in the city, with the accompanying increase in insecurities.

Among women, midwives appear to have been a particular target. Infant and maternal mortality rates were both high at the time, and these deaths, along with any deformity or illness, were likely to be blamed on the midwife. Some researchers have also noted the connection between the persecution of midwives as witches and the rise of the profession of male doctors.

Box 10.1 The evil eye

Although not usually thought of as witchcraft, belief in the *evil eye* has many of the same characteristics. The power of the evil eye, like that of witchcraft, lies within the body of the individual, who might or might not be aware of it. This belief is found primarily in India, the Middle East, parts of Europe, and Latin America.

A person with the evil eye is able to cause illness or some other type of misfortune simply by looking at or praising someone or something. This is especially the case with babies, and, in many societies, it is considered bad form to praise or say something complimentary about a child because the child could become ill and perhaps die. The concept is associated with envy, and people with the evil eye are jealous of the success or good luck of others.

One can avoid the evil eye by wearing charms that ward away the danger and by the recitation of certain formulas. When complimenting or praising a person, one makes sure to begin and end the compliment with a special formula. Spitting or particular hand gestures are also used to protect one against the malignant power of the evil eye. Another strategy is to conceal one's good fortune and avoid looking prosperous.

The idea of the evil eye varies from society to society. In the Maya region of Mexico, illness may be caused by *ojo*, or the evil eye, by a man or animal simply looking at a child.[26] People with the evil eye are dangerous, and one must deal with them with great care. One can recognize these individuals by a mole, a prominent vein, or a mark between the eyebrows. Cures may be affected by some type of contact with the person who has the evil eye. For example, a man who has brought about sickness in a child might be asked to place the child's finger in his mouth or rub some of his saliva on the child's mouth.

Modern-day witch hunts

At the height of the McCarthy era, Arthur Miller wrote the play *The Crucible* (1953), which used the Salem trials as an allegory for McCarthyism. The term *witch hunt* is often used to describe modern events, especially in recent years, but how similar are these to the historical and cross-cultural events that we have discussed so far in this chapter?

The McCarthy era took place in the United States in the early 1950s. Beginning with "loyalty" programs under President Truman and extending to investigations by the House Committee on Un-American Activities that resulted in blacklists and jail terms, the overwhelming concern was that "radicals" and communists were part of a vast conspiracy to destroy American democracy.

How similar were the events of the McCarthy era to the European witch hunts? Both began with strong emotions fueling a "scare" of a vast secret conspiracy whose purpose was purely subversive and potentially apocalyptic. The focus in both cases was the identification of the adversaries of society, with investigations spiraling as those identified were pressured to implicate others. Both focused on purity and unity and showed an intense preoccupation with loyalty (to Christianity during the European Witchcraze, to American democracy during the McCarthy era).

The most obvious difference is the lack of a supernatural, religious element to McCarthyism. However, both certainly showed extraordinary levels of exaggeration and misperception. The ideas about communists and subversives during the McCarthy era reached beyond reality into outright fantasy. For a modern witch hunt case that includes more direct religious elements, we can look at the child sex abuse crisis in the United States in the 1980s.

During the 1960s and 1970s, much about modern family life had changed, including shifting gender roles and a rise in divorce rates. The 1960s also saw the "discovery" of child battering, and in 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act was passed. Adding to the cultural mix was a growth in religious cults and growing fears of Satanism and the occult. Many in American society believed that Satanic cults were sexually abusing children. The general mood was one of fearfulness about the family and children specifically; the family was seen as disintegrating, and children were being put in peril. The mix of emotions (fear, guilt, outrage) set the stage for a witch hunt.

Beginning in California in the early 1980s, authorities thought they had discovered "satanic sex rings" that were sexually abusing children and engaging in various acts of Devil worship. Perhaps the most famous case is that of the McMartin Preschool, but there were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of investigations. Evidence to support the allegations of satanic activity was never found, and the methods used by investigators have largely been discredited. Although favoring the prosecution's perspective at first, even the media at the time eventually labeled these cases as witch hunts.

In the mid-2010s, the concept of a *metaphorical* witch hunt again entered American politics[27] and eventually spread into the politics of other countries, such as Israel, Estonia, and Poland. Primarily wielded as a way of expressing political grievances and perceived political persecution, the label continues to be associated with social struggles related to gender, vulnerability, social norms, and morality. Worldwide, witchcraft accusations, trials, and deaths are rising, with many recent instances in Congo, Zambia, Angola, Benin, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, South Africa, England, and India, among other countries.[28]

Neo-paganism and revival

The term **neo-paganism** refers to pre-Christian religious traditions that have been revived and are practiced in contemporary times, an example of *revivalistic movements*. One of the best-known of the Neo-Pagan religions is the Wiccan religion.

The Wiccan movement

The beginnings of the Wiccan religion can be traced to the publication of several important books. The first was *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, written by anthropologist Margaret Murray in 1921. In this book, Murray examined the Witchcraze, which is referred to by Wiccans as "the Burning Times." She focused on what she believed to be the connection of the Witchcraze to the persecution of practitioners of pre-Christian religions. She believed that there was an unbroken line between pre-Christian goddess-based religions and women who were labeled as witches. This claim is very controversial, and most Wiccan practitioners today see their religion as a reconstruction, not a continuation, of earlier practices. Importantly, the timing of the publication of the book coincided with the suffragist movement in the United States, an early feminist movement that centered on gaining women the right to vote. The idea of a pre-Christian religion that valued and worshipped women was appealing, and a return to such religious practices fits in well with ideas of female empowerment.

The Wiccan movement took off in the 1950s. This was largely due to the work of Gerald Gardner (1884–1964), who wrote *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959). Gardner was an amateur anthropologist who, in 1908, studied the Dyaks of Borneo. Gardner continued Margaret Murray's idea that witchcraft was a pre-Christian religion in Britain. Gardner then went on to say that he had found and joined a coven of witches whom he believed to be among the last remnants of this old religion.

Wiccan beliefs and rituals

There is much variety in Wiccan beliefs and practices. Here, we will discuss some of the most common features. Wicca is a *polytheistic religion*, although which of the pagan gods and goddesses are invoked varies. Gender equality—the god and the goddess—is stressed, as is nature as a manifestation of deity.

The religion is, in many ways, nature-based and includes a ritual calendar. One set of rituals is performed at full moons and is associated with the goddess. There are also eight Sabbats, or solar festivals, related to the god. The Sabbats happen seasonally and are related to such events as times of planting and harvesting. They also are seen as symbolic of events in the life of the god and goddess. The Sabbats include:

- Samhain—the New Year festival (Chapter 8), the death of the god
- Yule—the Winter Solstice, rebirth of the god through the goddess
- Imbolc—February 1, associated with purification and fertility
- Ostara—the Spring Solstice
- Beltane—April 30, when the young god becomes a man
- Midsummer—when powers of nature are seen as being at their peak
- Lughnasadh—beginning of the harvest
- Mabon—the second harvest, the waning of the god

The rituals themselves are varied but often begin with casting a circle to create a sacred space. After the circle is cast, invocations are recited to the four cardinal directions (Figure 10.5). As part of this, or after this, the gods and goddesses are invoked to observe the ritual. From this point, the ritual will vary according to its purpose. Common elements include singing and chanting, the manipulation of symbols, and a ritual meal.

Figure 10.5 Wiccan altar. A traditional Wiccan altar with magical working tools, including the athame, boline, sword, pentacle, wand, chalice, and censer.

Source: Wikimedia

Common Wiccan symbols include images or candles to represent the god and goddess. The **athame**, or ritual knife, and wand are commonly used to cast the circle, and cauldrons and cups are symbolic of the goddess. A broom may be used to sweep and thus purify an area. The pentacle is another Wiccan symbol (Chapter 2).

The use of magic is also characteristic of the Wiccan religion. This includes folk magic, which may be secular, and ritual magic. Contrary to common misperceptions, all magic in Wicca is to be used for good and never for evil. This can be seen in the Wiccan Law of Return. A karma-like idea, this law says that whatever good you do will return to you, as will any evil. There are several variations on this, such as the Threefold Law, which says good and evil will return threefold, and the Ten-fold Law, which says that good and evil will return tenfold. Wiccans also have a moral rule known as the **Wiccan *rede***. In essence, the *Short rede* says that you can do whatever you want as long as it does not harm anyone. It was first documented in 1964. The *Long Rede* is a 26-line poem that first appeared in 1974:

> Bide the Wiccan laws we must In Perfect Love and Perfect Trust
> Live and let live. Fairly take and fairly give.
> Cast the Circle thrice about to keep the evil spirits out.
> To bind the spell every time let the spell be spake in rhyme.
> Soft of eye and light of touch, Speak little, listen much . . .[29]

The Wiccan athame

Wiccans use four primary tools: a wand, a pentacle, a cup or chalice, and a ceremonial blade called an *athame*. Never used for cutting, the athame, instead, is used to direct and move psychic energies, especially when the sacred Circle is cast, consecrating the ritual space. The athame has some similarities with the Javanese ***kris***, a weapon and ancient spiritual object that is now promoted as a cultural symbol of Indonesia.

The growing popularity and persecution of Wicca

Although the exact number of followers is difficult to gauge, Wicca has expanded rapidly, primarily in North America and Europe. The religion has also recently gained important official recognition. The U.S. Armed Forces chaplain's handbook now contains a section on Wicca, and Wiccan practitioners have won court cases affirming the right to practice the religion.

Wicca has many features that make it appealing, especially to young women. These include the lack of sexist beliefs and discrimination in general and a focus on the female aspects, or the *goddess*. A concern for nature and the environment also fits in well with modern ideas. Whereas for some, the morality of traditional religions seems excessively restrictive, Wicca has a single moral rule (the Wiccan *rede*). The practice of Wicca is very flexible and allows for personal involvement. Individuals can practice the religion alone or within a group and are free to add their own symbols and rituals as they see fit.

Wicca has also appeared in many popular media presentations in recent years. However, despite the growing numbers of Wiccan practitioners and the increasing media exposure, Wicca remains a religion that is largely misunderstood. Practitioners are often persecuted and the subjects of hate crimes. Some of this misunderstanding comes from the Wiccan use of the term *witch* and symbols such as the pentacle, which for most North Americans and Europeans have strong negative connotations; many see these as signs of devil worship. For Wiccans, the idea of a devil is a Christian notion, and so they have no connection with it. (See Box 10.2 for a discussion of Satanism.)

Wiccans choose to use the term *witch* because, for them, it has a different but important meaning and connotation. For them, *witch* was a term that was unfairly applied to pagans, healers, and people who practiced an age-old tradition of *folk magic*. To call themselves witches is seen as reclaiming the term and reaffirming their heritage.

Box 10.2 Satanism

Most modern Satanists do not conform to the conceptions that many people have about them. We must distinguish between people who have been labeled Satan worshippers by others, which for some conservative Christian groups would include any non-Christian religion and those who label themselves as Satanists.

Very few people actually worship Satan as the personification of evil, although some do claim to worship a Lucifer or Satan whom they believe is an ancient deity mistakenly identified as the Devil by Christians. The view these Satanists have of Satan is a pagan image that focuses on power, virility, and sexuality. To most Satanists, though, Satan is more like a force of nature than a deity. Their Satan is not the Christian Devil and has nothing to do with the Christian Hell, demons, buying people's souls, human sacrifice, or truly evil deeds. Satanists do not even believe that Heaven and Hell exist.

Although there is much variety in the beliefs of Satanists, we can describe some of the more common beliefs. Satanists generally believe that each person is fully responsible for his or her own life, and the emphasis is on the individual, not on a

god or goddess. Life itself is respected and valued; despite common misconceptions, Satanists do not advocate or practice animal or human sacrifices.

The largest of the many religious traditions within Satanism is the Church of Satan, founded by Anton Szandor La Vey in 1966. In the forward to *The Satanic Bible* (1969), Burton Wolfe states, "Satanism is a blatantly selfish, brutal philosophy. It is based on the belief that human beings are inherently selfish, violent creatures."[30] La Vey believed that the Judeo-Christian traditions have taught us to suppress our true feelings, which has resulted in nothing but misery. The Church of Satan could be described as a form of **hedonism**. Satanists believe in the gratification of all of one's desires. Instead of abstinence, Satanists believe in indulgence. The behaviors that the Catholic Church labels as sin are seen as virtuous. The Church of Satan does recognize sins, but they are entirely different ones, including ignorance, pretentiousness, self-deceit, and conformity. The Church of Satan says that although it is important to be kind to those who deserve it, one should not waste love on those who do not deserve it. Do not turn the other cheek; instead, seek vengeance.

Rituals are conducted and generally are one of three types: ones that involve sex magic, ones that are focused on healing or happiness, and destruction rituals focused on a specific victim. The use of magic in Satanism resembles somewhat the magical practices of Wicca (Chapter 7). However, many Satanists think that the Wiccans are hypocrites because they limit their magic to positive uses. In contrast, although Satanists use magic to benefit themselves and their friends, they also use magic and rituals to harm their enemies.

The most important symbol of the Church of Satan is the Sigil of Baphomet, which is a goat's head drawn within an inverted pentagram. At the time *The Satanic Bible* was written (1969), it was common for Satanists to use a naked woman as an altar, symbolizing that Satanism is a religion of the flesh, not the spirit. This is now rarely used. Although Satanists have been blamed for kidnapping and the sacrifice of people and animals, this is an urban legend.

Conclusion

Fear of the existence of supernaturally evil individuals appears to be universal. And who should we fear most as potential evildoers? People who stand out, people with whom we have existing conflicts, and the vulnerable in any society. If my neighbor is jealous of my success, might they not want to bring me down and cause me harm? Of course, they might well think the same of me. The witch is often the enemy within—the member of the community who rejects, subverts, and betrays or is simply vulnerable or marginal. As with many religious phenomena, witchcraft accusations are closely tied to other social phenomena—in this case, reflecting existing tensions and fears. In reality, the most common way to become a witch is to be accused of being one.

Witchcraft is a fascinating subject in the realm of religious beliefs and behaviors. Studying this phenomenon is made more complicated by the different ways the term has been used in small-scale, European, and modern Neo-Pagan communities. Our continuing interest in the subjects of magic and witchcraft can be seen in popular media representations such as the television shows *Bewitched, Charmed, Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and, of course, the extremely popular *Harry Potter* book series. However, these fantasy representations differ significantly from the real phenomena. First, these sources show magic and witchcraft as very similar phenomena, if not one and the same. Second, witches are almost always portrayed in a very positive light, which does not fit every other case. In small-scale societies, practicing witchcraft is, by definition, antisocial behavior. Even Wiccans would argue with many of the representations of the powers of witches, which are shown as being far beyond those that are actually claimed.

The rise of the Neo-Pagan religions and their redefinition of witchcraft are but one example of how religions rise and fall and change over time. This topic is one that we will explore in greater detail in the next chapters.

Summary

The idea of *witchcraft* as an evil force bringing misfortune to members of a community is found in a great number of societies throughout the world. Unlike *sorcerers*, who perform magic rituals and manipulations primarily to achieve negative ends, witches may intentionally or involuntarily will death and destruction—when this happens, it is believed to be caused by a supernatural power that lies within the body of the witch. The earliest concept of witchcraft in small-scale societies is largely based on the work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard among Azandes of the Sudan.

Because witchcraft and sorcery are sometimes ambiguous and can be difficult to distinguish, some scholars use the term *wizardry* to refer to these practices. In their study of wizardry, Alice and Irvin Child point out seven social attributes of wizardry, including social control, redirecting aggression within the group, segmentation of the community, in-group versus out-group, maintaining social structure, restoring social equilibrium, and supporting the worldview.

Ideas of witchcraft in Europe were influenced by Christian ideas about the nature of evil. Christianity accepts the existence of an evil spirit known as Satan or the Devil. In this belief system, witches are individuals whose evil power originates with a pact with the Devil. In Europe, witchcraft beliefs were merged with sorcery. Sorcery became associated with the invocation of spirits defined as hostile to God. Anyone doing any form of magic was seen as calling on the servants of Satan. Magic and witchcraft became not just crimes against society but *heresy*—crimes against God.

The period known as the *Witchcraze* began at the end of the Middle Ages (around 1450) and lasted for about 200 years. In Euro-American witchcraft beliefs, witches define all that is wrong and immoral. People who exhibit antisocial behavior are the most likely targets of witchcraft accusations. Witches also fulfill our unconscious need to blame someone for the misfortunes that we experience in our daily lives. In general, patterns of witchcraft accusations reflect deeply felt conflicts and divisions in a society.

Contemporary practices of witchcraft are known as *neo-paganism* and, in the case of Wicca, are associated most commonly with the practice of social good. Their moral tenets, originating in the Wiccan *rede*, are based on the principle "if it harms no one, do what you will."

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 10.

Study questions

1. The word "witchcraft" is an ambiguous term with various meanings. Why do you think this term is difficult to define across cultures? Identify some of the ways that this term has been used.
2. Compare and contrast "witchcraft" and "sorcery." How does the term "wizardry" bridge these concepts? When have you heard these terms used in your society?
3. Discuss some of the social attributes of wizardry, according to Child and Child. How might wizardry be an adaptive mechanism?
4. What are the differences between witchcraft beliefs among Azandes and Zunis? How does the concept of witchcraft aid individuals in coping with the stresses of their lives?
5. Magic and witchcraft are popular subjects in U.S. pop culture today. How do depictions of magic and witchcraft in literature and movies differ from anthropological descriptions?
6. How does the modern-day Wiccan movement conform (or not) to the concept of witchcraft?

Notes

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27 "Witch-hunt" was also used during the 1973 Watergate scandal.
28 See https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/witch-trials-21st-century/
29 To read the 26 lines, see https://web.mit.edu/pipa/www/rede.html
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Chapter 11

Magic, medicine, and religion

The central theme of this chapter is that it can be difficult to separate religion, magic, and medicine. All three come together in the therapeutic setting as individuals and families make decisions regarding the course of action to take when confronting illness and death. Medical beliefs are commonly subsumed under the larger category of religious beliefs in a culture. Any ethnography with a chapter pertaining to religion includes at least several paragraphs describing medical beliefs and magic. As humans, we are practitioners of magic, a subset of religion. Think about this the next time you go to the doctor's office for any medical issue. Do you feel ripped off if you do not get some sort of treatment, or even an injection or a prescription? Most of us do not have the medical training to understand the pharmacological action of drugs, but we have the feeling that they are doing something to help us. Perhaps the *efficacy of belief* is one of the most powerful components of any medical system; our mindset frames our experiences.

Western *biomedicine* has explanatory models related to **disease** (a biological pathology or condition), whereas explanatory models of **illness** (a person's experience of ill health) are found among individuals and groups who are not biomedical practitioners. Patients seek treatment in one or more of three overlapping, interconnected sectors of healthcare—personal, folk, and professional. Explanatory models in the personal sector vary by individual, and treatment often intersects with the folk and professional sectors. Folk models found in ancient civilizations, small-scale, traditional societies, contemporary folk beliefs, and some alternative medical practices include both **personalistic medical models**, where disease is considered the result of human or supernatural behaviors, and **naturalistic medical models**, where disease is associated with the imbalance of natural forces in the body. The professional sector is dominated by the biomedical model.

Although biomedicine is the foundation of medical beliefs and practices in the U.S. and other Western-influenced countries, modern medicine only came of age within the last one hundred years. For those who might think that the medical beliefs and practices of small-scale societies are inferior to biomedicine, it is important to remember that until the mid-twentieth century, many Westerners sought treatments based on Medieval medicine. Vestiges of earlier medical models are present today in the personal and folk sectors and some of the symbols of biomedicine.

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Explanatory models

In religion (and medicine), **explanatory models** are used by people to interpret episodes of illness. Explanatory models relate how individuals in a culture explain and interpret what is happening to them. Even Western peoples use such models. For example, in the 1340s, when bubonic and pneumonic plague swept through Europe, the major explanatory model was that this was God's punishment for sin. Prevention included removing sin, as exemplified by the rise of flagellant societies in 1348–1349. Appearing in town squares, the flagellants performed acts of self-flagellation while urging onlookers to repent (Figure 11.1). Removing sin through magical rites of *scourging* was their way of preventing the Black Death. Obviously, people were unaware that the horrible buboes (swellings) on their bodies were connected to the fleas that infested rats.

Figure 11.1 Flagellants in Europe, Nuremburg Chronicles, fifteenth century; flagellants scourged themselves with ropes for purification and to urge others to repent in order to turn back disease believed to be the result of sin.

Source: Wikimedia

If this seems a bit foreign, fast forward to the 1980s, during the early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Many "straight" people labeled AIDS as a "gay disease," and preachers at the pulpit claimed AIDS was God's punishment for a certain lifestyle.[1] Some children who contracted HIV were expelled from school and, as a result of the social stigma, had their homes burned to the ground. In 1995, 80 percent of nurses surveyed claimed they would not give CPR to a stranger because of HIV/AIDS fear. Indeed, this virus created an atmosphere of fear and paranoia, and its victims were treated like outcasts.

Disease/illness dichotomy

Arthur Kleinman, Professor of Medical Anthropology at Harvard University, explains explanatory models through the disease/illness dichotomy. *Disease* is the model of Western medicine (biomedicine) that deals with the medical malfunctioning of the body and disease organisms. Conversely, *illness* pertains to culturally constructed models in which individuals interpret sickness through the logic of their culture.

Objectively, the primary concern of Western practitioners is to analyze *how* the symptoms came about in order to treat them properly, and there is little concern for the patient as a member of a cultural group. Hospital patients lose their personal identity, which is

replaced by labels describing their symptoms. For example, "the colostomy patient in room 302," or "the C-section baby in the nursery." Western physicians are trained to combat disease; some even specialize in the maladies that struck down family members, for instance, a neurologist whose mother's suicide influenced his career choice. Doctors are dedicated to bringing about cures for diseases, but little emphasis may be placed on patients besides the nature of their afflictions.

Most societies around the world see illness as a cultural phenomenon in which sick people are separated from their families because of the illness episode. *Healers*—shamans in traditional societies—determine *why* the malady occurred so they can restore the patient back to their family and community. Perhaps the best way to distinguish between disease and illness is that disease is a biomedical phenomenon, whereas perceptions of illness encompass all other beliefs (including folk and alternative medicines in the U.S.). Since diseases are largely invisible, people in small-scale societies typically blame other individuals (witches, sorcerers) or the supernatural for their plight. Perhaps they offended another person or violated a tabu. As in biomedicine, **diagnosis**, determining the cause of the illness, is necessary for proper **prognosis,** the expected outcomes based on the prescribed course of treatment. In tribal societies, magic involves healing, so a good part of the prognosis is to counter *shooting magic* (or *contagious magic*, see Chapter 7) caused by sorcerers, ghosts, or malevolent beings.

Healers in the three sectors of healthcare

The term *healer* is often used to refer to a priest or shaman, especially when the individual is focused on curing illness or injury. However, more specialized **healers** also exist. Many activities of healers are similar to those of U.S. medical practitioners. For example, they may set bones, treat sprains with cold, or administer drugs made from native plants and other materials.

Following Kleinman's model, physician Cecil G. Helman observes that, in any complex society, there are three overlapping, interconnected health care sectors: (1) popular, (2) folk, and (3) professional. Explanatory models exist in each sector. "Each sector has its own ways of explaining and treating ill health, defining who is the healer and who is the patient, and specifying how healer and patient should interact in their therapeutic encounter":[2]

1. The *popular sector* is represented by the lay, non-professional, non-specialist part of society. Importantly, this is the sector where ill health is first recognized and then defined before health care is sought in the other two sectors. Therapeutic options do not include payment, and the family is the main health arena in this sector. The primary providers are women, especially mothers and grandmothers. In Western and non-Western societies, 70 to 90 percent of health care takes place within this sector. Advice may also come from disease-experienced individuals, life-experienced individuals, paramedical professionals, doctors' spouses, organizers of self-help groups, or members of churches or cults.
2. The *folk sector* is found mostly in non-industrialized societies. Practitioners use variations of sacred or secular healing techniques not typically recognized by the professional sector. Personalistic medical models are found in the folk sector (see further on). Healers include secular and technical "bone-setters, midwives, tooth extractors or herbalists, to spiritual healers, clairvoyants and shamans."[3] Folk healers form a heterogenous group and all

manifest individual styles (Figure 11.2). Sometimes, there are associations of healers who have rules of entry, codes of conduct, and the sharing of secret knowledge. For instance, Kiowa shamans who received their power from Buffalo belonged to the Buffalo Medicine Lodge. They accompanied war parties and were renowned for treating wounded warriors.

Figure 11.2 A Philippine man visits a faith healer in Naga City; folk vendors such as this one will often offer a mixture of herbal and magical remedies for healing.

Source: Wikimedia

African-American folk healers include "herb doctors, root doctors, spiritualists, conjure men or women, Voodoo [Vodou] houngans or mambos, healing ministers and faith healers, neighborhood prophets, granny women and vendors of magical herbs, roots and patent medicines."[4] Spiritual healers, working out of temples, churches, or candle shops deal with illnesses caused by sorcery or divine punishment. Most secular illnesses are self-treated or treated by neighborhood "grannies," although folk medicine can also be practiced concurrently with other medical approaches.

Alternative and complementary medical systems form a special type of health care within the folk sector. Healers include acupuncturists, homeopaths (**homeopathic medicine** is treating with minute doses of drugs that produce symptoms similar to that of the disease; *like treats like*), chiropractors (**chiropractic treatment** involves nerve function and adjusting the spinal column), osteopaths (**osteopathy** is the manipulation of the skeleton and muscles), herbalists, naturopaths, spiritual healers, hypnotists, massage therapists, and medication experts. In recent years, some of these systems—osteopathy and chiropractic medicine—have been recognized by the Western professional biomedical sector.

3. The *professional sector* is the organized, legally sanctioned healing profession, otherwise known as Western scientific medicine, or *biomedicine*. Western medicine involves the belief in **allopathy**, where diseases are treated by the use of agents producing effects different from those of the disease treated, thus treating the symptoms (i.e., germ theory). Physicians of various types and specialties and the recognized paramedical professions—nurses, midwives, and physiotherapists—work in the professional sector. Outside of economically developed countries, Western medicine "provides only a small proportion of health care in most countries of the world." Shortages of clinics and personnel exist worldwide. In economically developing countries, Western medicine differs based on the economy and politics of the governing body.[5] Many governments have used traditional healers as conduits for the introduction of new practices in nutrition and public health (Box 11.1).

Box 11.1 African healers meet Western medicine

Traditionally, healers have played important roles in the lives of people in sub-Saharan Africa, providing simple health services as they work in consort with the spirit world. Today, Western medicine also plays an important role. A great many native Africans are doctors, nurses, and other health practitioners, and large hospitals have been built in urban centers. Yet, the majority of the population has little access to Western medicine. The World Health Organization estimates that there is one doctor for every 40,000 people.[6] Hospitals and clinics are often not available in rural areas, and the cost of medical services and medicines is often prohibitive.

Conversely, the ratio of traditional healers to people in Africa is about 1 to 500.[7] A solution to the problem of making basic health education and services available to rural communities is to recognize the importance and effectiveness of healers in many medical situations. In addition, healers can be trained in many aspects of Western medicine, and Western practitioners can learn the Indigenous explanatory models, thus forming a partnership between traditional healing and medicine. Healers are available and trusted members of the community and, therefore, can have a major impact on the general state of health in these areas.

Many programs have been developed in Africa to train native healers in medical techniques. One such group is Prometra, the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Medicine. The organization provides medical training to healers while promoting native healing methods at the same time. Experiences between native populations and European powers fostered a deep mistrust between the medical establishments of colonial governments and local healers. This mistrust is now being overcome. For example, traditional healers recognize symptoms of HIV/AIDS and can refer patients to medical facilities. They can also monitor infant health and practice infant oral rehydration; dehydration is a major cause of infant mortality.

Sources: Prometra (www.prometra.org); S. Faris, "Calling All Healers," *Time* (July 24, 2006), pp. 42–43.

Personalistic and naturalistic medical systems

In their seminal textbook, *Medical Anthropology* (1978), Barbara Anderson and co-author George M. Foster propose a dual division of identifying disease among non-Western peoples: personalistic and naturalistic medical systems. Unlike the allopathic system of professional biomedicine that separates the body from the mind and spirit (*Cartesian split)*, the personalistic and naturalistic medical systems tend towards seeing human health and medicine as holistic, involving body, mind, spirit, and emotions. These medical approaches are commonly at the intersection of religion and healing, mingled.

Personalistic Medical Systems—in a personalistic medical system, the disease is believed to be purposefully caused by a *sensate* agent (as perceived by the senses). The agent typically is a deity, a nonhuman being, such as a ghost, ancestor, malevolent spirit, or a human witch or sorcerer. Personalistic systems are also called *supernatural models*. In personalistic medical systems, sorcery, witchcraft, and spirit possession are usually considered causes of illness. For example, in Latin American folk medicine, a supernatural class of disease is caused by *mal de ojo,* "evil eye," or *susto*, "fright." In *mal de ojo*, a person is cursed through a gaze or stare by someone who intends them harm. Often, the victim is unaware of being a target until they develop symptoms of sickness that can include fatigue, nausea, and bad luck. *Susto* is believed to be caused by soul loss, provoked by anything that results in a sharp, extreme fear response—such as seeing a ghost, being in a car accident, or having a terrible fall. In the body, it manifests as anxiety, restlessness, and fatigue. Both of these personalistic diseases must be treated in culturally-appropriate ways (Figure 11.3).[8]

Figure 11.3 A traditional doctor advertising in Cameroon; personalistic treatments are sometimes used in addition to naturalistic treatments.

Source: Wikimedia

Naturalistic Medical Systems—in a naturalistic medical system, the disease is believed to be caused by impersonal, systemic causes. In other words, getting sick has nothing to do with other people or supernatural agents; there is no malicious intent on the part of another. Instead, naturalistic medical models are characterized by the equilibrium model of balance: one has good health with a balance of *insensate* agents (without feelings or sensation)—for example, hot/cold, yin/yang, and the humors. An imbalance of agents might be caused by eating the wrong foods, changes in temperature, strong winds, or other factors. Imbalance causes sickness. Naturalistic systems are sometimes referred to as natural or *nonsupernatural models*.[9]

In naturalistic medical systems, imbalances cause illness to originate within the body or from outside forces like hot or cold. The hot/cold dichotomy is common throughout the world. Hot/cold does not refer to temperatures per se but to qualities associated with elements. For example, in Latin American folk medicine, hot and cold refers to foods, medicinal herbs, many objects, and events or conditions, such as ice, menstruation, pregnancy, and an eclipse of the moon (all conditions of cold). This is analogous to our usage of unusual terms like "soft" and "hard" water in relation to mineral content or "dry" and "sweet" wines.[10]

There are three major naturalistic systems in the world today: (1) *Humoral Pathology*, found in Latin American folk medicine, (2) *Ayurvedic* medicine practiced in India and adjacent parts of South Asia, and (3) *Traditional Chinese* medicine. The latter two

traditions are the national medical systems of India and China; all three have commonalities with the "Great Tradition" of medicine found in the classical civilizations of Greece, India, and China.[11] As will be seen further on, Western medical practices were steeped in humoral pathology until the mid-twentieth century.

Foster and Anderson maintain that non-Western medical systems often have some degree of overlap between personalistic and naturalistic models but that one system will predominate. For example, their research in the Venezuelan village of El Morro determined that 89 percent of illnesses were attributed to naturalistic causes and 11 percent to personalistic causes. Their conclusion: the majority adhere to a naturalistic system.[12]

Personalistic medicine in small-scale societies

Personalistic medical systems are found mostly in Indigenous North and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, tribal Asia, complex societies in West Africa, and among the Mayas. They were also documented among the Aztecs and Incas. Causality in personalistic systems is typically attributed to humans or supernatural beings, such as sorcerers, witches, supreme gods, lesser gods, evil spirits, or ghosts. Biomedical practitioners might ascribe scientific causes to *how* someone becomes ill, but in small-scale societies, explanatory models of *why* someone gets sick are more important. Questions might involve: Who did I offend? Did I break a tabu? Did I fail to leave offerings at ancestral shrines? Is someone jealous of me? Finding out the cause is critical, especially if *shooting magic* (or *contagious magic*, see Chapter 7) caused by sorcerers, ghosts, or malevolent beings needs to be neutralized by counter magic and treatment. Some cross-cultural examples of causation and treatment follow (see Table 11.1). Note that remnants of these same ancient medical beliefs are present in both complex and small-scale societies today.

For instance, vestiges of shooting magic exist in the belief that sickness is caused by foreign pathogens. As an example, we still use the expressions "I picked up an amoeba" or "I caught a cold." Such statements are logical also to many Indigenous peoples who believe that foreign agents enter the body when they are sick. Disease objects are not the only source of intrusion—*spirit possession* as a cause of illness is recognized in many traditional societies. In the Marquesas Islands, there is a pantheon of spirits responsible for specific illnesses. Khoisans of southern Africa believe that little yellow spirits enter people's bodies as directed by the spirits above them. Epidemics are likened to hordes of them passing through the area. We

Table 11.1 Cross-cultural causes, prevention, and treatments in personalistic medical systems

Causes	*Prevention*	*Treatment*
Foreign pathogens	Charms/amulets	Sucking technique
Spirit possession	Prayers	Exorcisms, beatings, fires
Soul loss	Protective rites	Shaman seeks to restore lost soul
Tabu breeches	Avoid certain foods/behaviors	Cleansing/purification rites
Ghosts	Charms/amulets	Cleansing/purification rites
Ancestors	Prayers/offerings	Cleansing rites/offerings
Image magic	Charms/amulets	Counter magic
Greater/lesser gods	Charms/prayers/amulets	Offerings

have demon possession in our own society (as portrayed in *The Exorcist*). Instances of spirit possession are also reported in various religious texts, such as the Bible and Qur'an.

In many societies around the world, spirit possession is associated with mental and physical illness; epileptic seizures are usually the most common association with spirit possession (see Hmong souls in Chapter 8). Exorcism is believed to cause the spirits to leave the person's body. It is believed that the prehistoric custom of **trepanation**, chiseling a hole in the skull about the size of a quarter, would allow the spirits to exit from afflicted individuals (Figure 11.4). In some societies, making the spirit uncomfortable is equivalent to an exorcism. The Gas of West Africa compel the spirits to depart by beating the patient. In the Society Islands, heated stones are passed over the person's body, and in the Marquesas, fires are built over or under those who are sick.[13]

Figure 11.4 A skull from the Iron Age period (1200–550 BCE); trepanation is clearly visible on the skull, an attempt to ease suffering.

Source: Wikimedia

Throughout Native North America, **soul loss** was another symptom of illness. In such instances, shamans attempted to reunite the body with its wandering soul. Tabu breaches were a common explanation, especially eating animals that were part of one's personal power (the concept of *totem*, a symbol or emblem that stands for a social unit). To prevent soul loss, Plains Indians often avoided eating magpies, vultures, or other scavenging animals they saw as ritually polluted.

Roman Nose, a renowned Cheyenne warrior, had a tabu against eating food prepared with white men's metal. Prior to the 1868 Beecher Island fight in Kansas, he unknowingly ate bread that had been taken out of a frying pan with a fork. Learning this, he was reticent to fight against the cavalry scouts because he knew he would die. Even his bulletproof war bonnet made by Ice, a famed shaman, would not protect him, for he had broken his tabu. Roman Nose could have participated in a purification rite, but goading by other warriors compelled him to enter the battle; almost immediately, he was mortally wounded as he rode into combat.

Shamanistic techniques

Since explanatory models of contagious magic predominate in personalistic medical systems in small-scale societies, shamans are characteristically involved in healing. Commonly, the shaman would attempt to remove foreign agents or substances that have entered the victim's body. Shamans employ the *sucking technique*, using the horn of an animal—buffalo, cow, deer, caribou—or their bare mouths to suck out the "poison" from the abdomen of their patients.

Kiowa elders in southwestern Oklahoma reminisce about healing episodes that happened in the early and mid-twentieth century (and more recently). Imagine an Indian tract home outside Carnegie, Oklahoma, with a bedridden family member. Earlier, a relative of the afflicted consulted a shaman, who agreed to examine the patient. Since most tribal peoples believe that healing occurs at the family level, relatives have congregated in the front room, now cleared of all furniture except the sickbed, the chairs, and benches that line the perimeter of the room.

The shaman arrives and examines the patient, who is disrobed from the waist up. Taking his fingers and placing them at certain locations, he searches for the point of entry of the foreign agent. After discovering it, he might take a yellow hammer or hawk-feathered fan, smoke it in cedar, and then apply it to that point. An individual who had this procedure reported intense pain at that particular moment, then a sense of relief. The shaman then takes a hollow cow horn, applies it to that location (affixed with sinew), and then sucks out the agent, spitting a bloody mucus into his hand. Then, through his powers, he causes the object to disappear.

Some skeptics believe that this is merely a magician's trick performed by the shaman because he has already put the object into his mouth before "sucking" the entity out of the patient's body. To tribal peoples, however, this procedure is very real and represents the shaman's powers and success. Regardless of opinions, the object represents or symbolizes the malady being removed from the patient's body. This is where the magic comes into play because patients and observers want tangible evidence that something real is happening; the power of a shaman is marked by his ability to perform magical feats. Recall that all shamans are magicians and know how to perform feats of magic using sleight of hand and other techniques. In fact, noted shamans are known to display their powers publicly.

Weston LaBarre was part of the Santa Fe Laboratory of Anthropology field expedition that worked in southwestern Oklahoma during the summer of 1935. LaBarre and four other anthropologists interviewed approximately 30 Kiowa elders, many of whom were born in the mid-nineteenth century. In his fieldnotes, LaBarre accuses a shaman of deception:

> Lone Bear, a medicine man and one of the phoniest characters I ever met. . . . He is said to be able to vomit small turtles, which he places in a bowl of water. He is the only Kiowa who deliberately tried to misinform me. . . . Friend Lone Bear once demonstrated his power to vomit red-paint to Bill [William Bascom] who was driving the car with Lone Bear beside him. Suddenly he spits and splattered Bill all over with red clay and saliva. Unfortunately

Taqui Onqoy, the Dancing Sickness

Spanish colonization caused deep destruction to Indigenous societies all over the Americas, and it was sometimes seen as an invading "sickness." Interestingly, it was through the sense of a common illness that many Indigenous people began to unite against their oppressors. Small, diverse ethnicities, little by little, forged a sense of common identity as Indigenous peoples, referred to as ***pan-andinismo*** in highland South America. In the 1560s, an Indigenous rebellion broke out in central Peru called Taqui Onqoy ("the dancing sickness"), and it quickly spread throughout the colony. The symptoms of the disease were trembling and spirit possession by the Indigenous gods, who communicated to the people that they were offended by the presence of Christianity. Afflicted Indigenous individuals would paint themselves with red pigments and dance uncontrollably, gaining sympathizers and creating a sense of unity within and among the Indigenous community that shared this oppression. These outbreaks of illness sparked an ongoing series of rebellions against Spanish colonial society.

> for the trick, Bill had unsuspectingly seen Lone Bear surreptitiously put something into his mouth a few minutes before.[14]

Kiowas believed that shamans, like the buffalo bull, had *gietso*, or power in their stomachs. Just as the buffalo bull brings up cud from its stomachs, so does the shaman. Hence, they swallowed (or kept in their mouths) lumps of red and multicolored clay that they spewed over the bodies of their patients during healing episodes.

Beyond the magical feats of shamans, it is important to recognize that part of the healing process occurs on a spiritual level. Since shamans experience out-of-body experiences through trances to achieve an alternate reality, they have the ability to communicate with the spirit world to bring back information to help their patients. On a spiritual level, belief is a key factor. If people strongly believe in the powers of the shaman and that the shaman has the ability to heal them, then that is half of the battle. Efficacy of belief is important in any medical system, including Western biomedicine. Attitude or mindset is a major component of wellness, so placing faith in one's practitioner is critical. The fact that shamans have spiritual connections makes it even better because they can invoke supernatural assistance to augment the actual medicines and techniques they employ.

In Western society, we pray for those who are sick and suffering, so if the efficacy of belief is not real, then why should we waste our time praying? If we think tribal peoples utilizing shamans are foolish because they depend on magic, are we any different? In double-blind drug studies, the efficacy of belief is demonstrated by the *placebo effect*, where members of a *control group* and an *experimental group* receive either the real drug to be tested or the placebo (fake medicine, like a sugar pill). It is not unusual for one-half of the group receiving the placebo to achieve the desired effect of the real drug. Mind over matter can be a powerful force. In his book *Spirit Talkers. North American Indian Medicine Powers* (2012), William S. Lyon maintains that the *observer effect* best explains the efficacy of shamanic healing techniques, whereas the collective mindset of wellness among family members attending a healing ceremony adds to the effectiveness of the shaman's powers.

Faith healing—prayers and gestures to elicit divine or spiritual intervention for healing—occurs in all societies and is a good example of the efficacy of belief; shamanism is also a form of faith healing. Some contemporary Christian healers employ the same shamanistic techniques as tribal shamans, although they deny that any "trickery" or sleight of hand occurs. Some scholars even believe that Jesus employed shamanic healing techniques, as found in Mark 7:31–37 when he restored hearing to a deaf man, and in Mark 8:22–26 and John 9:6, when he healed two blind men:

> They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then Jesus sent him away to his home saying, "Do not even go into the village."
>
> (Mark 8:22–26)

In this healing episode: (1) Jesus takes the man to a private spot for healing. Though shamans often perform their healing rites in public, some therapeutic rites occur in private without attracting attention. Telling the man not to go into the village—presumably not to tell people—suggests this. (2) Using a natural element like saliva, smoke, fire, water, or stones is usually part of the shamanic technique. (3) Oftentimes, several rounds of healing have to be applied by the shaman: in this case, two. (4) Finally, asking the patient if he sees anything is part of shamanic healing rites that require the patient to participate in the healing episode.

Sometimes contagious magic involves the use of image magic, where a sorcerer fashions an image or likeness of the victim to cause harm, for instance, Vodou dolls in Haiti (Figure 11.5). In such societies, prevention is often more important than cure. Proactive measures might involve wearing protective charms or drinking a concoction to counter any magic sent by others.

Indigenous beliefs in magic are sometimes no different than biomedical beliefs, as demonstrated by a case study in China, where traditional practices probably prevented the further spread of a cholera epidemic. In another example, a Pacific Islander shaman understands and respects the power of Novocain and its ritual syringe.

Figure 11.5 Vodou dolls at the Voodoo Museum in New Orleans; this is a form of image magic—actions carried out on the figurine are believed to affect the individual it represents (imitative magic).

Source: Wikimedia

Cholera in a Chinese village

Chinese-American Francis Hsu (1909–1999) was conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a Chinese village in 1942 when a cholera epidemic broke out. There were different opinions among the villagers to explain the cause of the outbreak. Most people blamed the epidemic on angry spirits that needed to be placated with prayers and charms. Some, however, allowed themselves to be given anti-cholera shots (reflecting Western cultural values in our version of magic—science), whereas others adhered to local prohibitions to ward off the epidemic. Traditional beliefs maintained that they could cure the disease by not eating certain foods typically washed in water (cholera is a bacillus that can live suspended in water for 30 days without a host) and by drinking magical fairy water, which probably was not contaminated with the bacillus.[15] Ironically, the Western belief in the cholera vaccine is equally founded in magic because biomedicine has now determined that cholera shots are largely ineffective.

Hence, there is very little difference between religion, magic, and medicine. Science as a belief system is not very different from the belief systems of non-Western peoples.

To reiterate this point, our trust in Western medicine—that only came of age in the late 1920s—borders on a belief in magic. We are taught to believe that taking medicine will help bring about cures, yet most of us do not understand the biochemical action of the prescriptions we take. If this were not the case, then the **placebo effect** would not exist. By definition, placebo is Latin for "I will please" and refers to a treatment that appears real but is designed to have no therapeutic benefit. A placebo can be a sugar pill, a water or salt water (saline) injection, or even a fake surgical procedure.[16] Placebos are used in double-blind drug tests when experimenting with new drugs. Interestingly, control groups administered placebos usually have about 50 percent success rates compared to the experimental group given the real drug.

Novocain magic

Paul Fejos, M.D. (1897–1963), a physician, filmmaker, and ethnologist who traveled through the Philippines, Indonesia, New Guinea, and other countries making ethnographic films in 1937–1938, began working for the Viking Fund (now the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research) in 1941. Fejos, fascinated with the interface between magic and medicine, believed that explaining maladies to natives in terms they could understand was much simpler than explaining microbiology to them, especially because non-Western peoples do not always acknowledge the world of microorganisms. He also believed that until non-literate societies become literate and can appreciate the differences between Western medicine and their own world of diffuse cultural symbols, it is best to qualify medical diagnoses and prognoses to them in terms they can understand.

Fejos wrote about his friend Unchi, a shaman he met while visiting one of the Pacific islands. During his visit, Fejos administered Novocain while performing dental procedures on some of the islanders. Unchi always accompanied him and carefully watched Fejos' procedures. Upon leaving the island, Fejos decided to leave Unchi with a farewell gift. Thinking Unchi wanted his shotgun, which he admired, Fejos was somewhat taken aback when the shaman asked for his syringe kit and Novocain. Unchi did not understand the pharmacological action of Novocain when administered with a syringe, but he appreciated the importance of the anesthetic given Fejos' ritual care of his equipment. Although Fejos knew his equipment would be safe in Unchi's hands, he had a commitment to his profession not to give the potentially lethal doses of Novocain to him. Fejos suggested that although non-Western peoples do not necessarily adhere to the biological rational of Western medicine, they usually appreciate the benefits (magic) of modern medicine.

Today, Indigenous peoples around the world have incorporated biomedicine into their medical systems by adapting traditional explanatory models to new medicines and procedures. (Antibiotics and penicillin were the earliest proselytizing agents.) For instance, Norma Wolff, who worked with the Yorubas of Nigeria, noted how some villages might have several different clinics, one of which might be represented by Western medicine.

Where Western medicine has made inroads, native peoples now distinguish between traditional illnesses and Western diseases. Leonard Bruguier (1944–2009), a Yankton Sioux descended from noted chiefs War Eagle and Struck by the Ree, went to the hospital to visit

his grandfather, who was dying from cancer. Leonard was puzzled why his grandfather, a member of the Native American Church, was in a white man's hospital instead of going to a peyote doctor. His grandfather had a very simple answer: "Grandson, I'm dying from a white man's disease, so that's why I have to use the white man's medicine."

Plant spirits and medicines in personalistic medical systems

William Howells (1908–2005), a biological anthropologist, notes that many remedies for magically induced illnesses are based on the properties of certain plants or animals. Significantly, the "rarer or more extraordinary they are the more effective they are likely to be." In Africa, different parts of a lion are important, and in Medieval Europe, cures for headaches required powers made from unicorn horns, which, in reality, are Narwhal tusks. Prescriptions for longevity included mummy dust imported from the Canary Islands, where the Guanches had placed their mummified family members in caves. After Spain conquered the Canaries, mummy dust became a major export. "Dragon" bones made from fossils, by the way, are still popular in China.[17]

Indigenous belief systems are steeped in *animism*, the belief in spirit beings or the presence of an inner soul in all things. While conducting fieldwork among Ojibwes of Manitoba in the 1930s, Irving Hallowell observed that Ojibwes recognize personhood in certain weather patterns, plants, rocks, and human-manufactured items. Ojibwe grammar distinguishes between persons and objects. Hence rocks used for sweatlodges, tobacco, trees, and plants are other-than-human-persons, powerful persons with benefits; tobacco smoke transports prayers to the spirit world, and many plants possess medicinal properties. Linguistic metaphors and chromatic art in Mesoamerica and the Southwest reference *Flower World*, a timeless paradise or spiritual realm of the dead. Plants obviously play an important role in people's lives, especially since so many medicines used today are derived from them.

Cherokee author Robert Conley (1940–2014) relates the origins of disease and medicine according to Cherokee lore: Long ago, all beings—plants, animals, birds, fishes, insects, and reptiles—communicated with one another and lived in harmony with people. In time, however, human population growth exploded around the globe, and Man developed weapons for hunting and fishing so he could eat the meat and wear the skins of other beings. Even the smallest creatures, like worms, suffered because they were used as bait.

Councils held among the animals attempted to determine the fate of Man. Bears convened first but failed to find a solution, followed by Deer, who decided that hunters failing to ask their forgiveness for killing them would suffer from debilitating rheumatism. Fishes and Reptiles gathered and agreed to make humans dream of Snakes and Fishes, causing them to lose their appetite, leading to their starvation. Finally, Grubworm presided over an assemblage of Birds, Insects, and small animals, where all concurred to send diseases to punish Man. Learning that the animals had unleashed diseases on Man, plants, including Trees, Shrubs, Grasses, Mosses, and Herbs decided to provide a cure for each affliction. Some contemporary Cherokees continue to administer various plant medicines and rational and spiritual therapy (Figure 11.6).[18]

Historian Virgil Vogel notes that at least 200 medicines utilized by American Indian practitioners in the Western Hemisphere were incorporated into the pharmacopeia of Western medicine.[19] New frontiers in modern medicine were opened because of these medicines—e.g.,

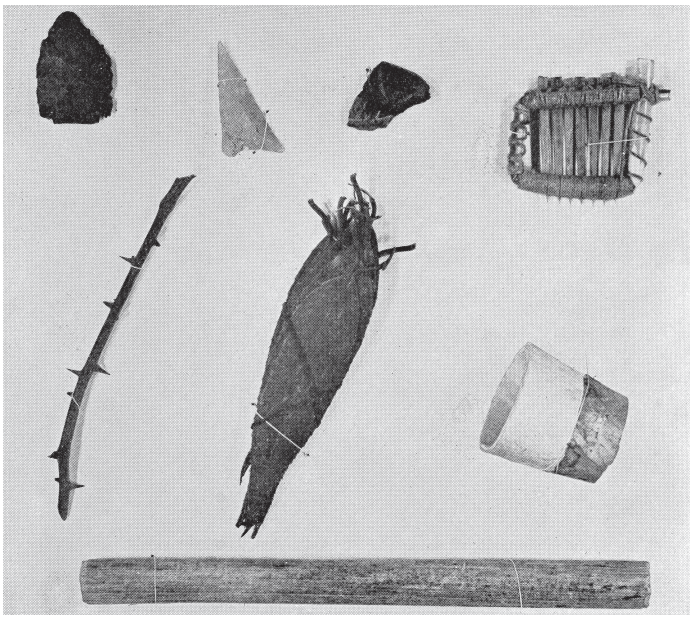

Figure 11.6 Early Cherokee surgical instruments; Cherokees have a wide range of medical treatments, many based on Native plants.

Source: Wikimedia

coca and *curare* transformed dentistry and surgery, and the active ingredients of the Mexican Yam (*Dioscorea Mexicana)*[20] are found in birth control pills. Many of these Native American medicines were derived from plants and, to a lesser extent, from animals and minerals.

Europeans coming to the Americas noted the use of plant medicines, but only a few appreciated their effectiveness. For instance, French explorer Jacques Cartier and 110 crew members spent the miserable winter of 1535–1536 living close to an Iroquoian village near present-day Montreal because their three ships were frozen solid in the ice where the St. Charles and St. Lawrence rivers conjoin (Figure 11.7). Subsisting on their unhealthy food stores, Cartier's men succumbed to *scurvy*, a dietary disease resulting from Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) deficiencies. Symptoms—bleeding gums, anemia, muscle and joint pain, subcutaneous bleeding, and overall fatigue—contributed to the death of 25 of his men by February. Indeed, the Frenchmen, who believed scurvy and other diseases were attributed to noxious or "bad air" (**miasma** theory), were in dire straits.

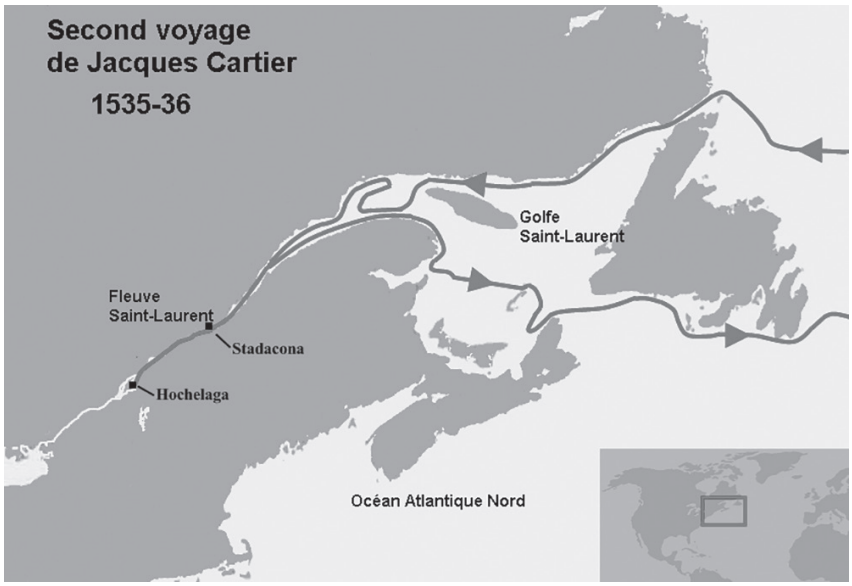

Figure 11.7 Jacques Cartier's Second Voyage to North America, 1535–1536.

Source: Wikimedia

The survivors' lives were saved by Chief Donnacona, who taught them how to boil the leaves of the White Spruce (*Thuja occidentalis*) and to bathe in the concoction that they apparently drank as well. Over 200 years later, British naval surgeon James Lind read Cartier's account, which led him to "discover" the treatment for scurvy. By the nineteenth century, the British Royal Navy added lime and lemon juice to the sailors' rations of grog, a watered-down rum; afterward, British sailors were often called Limeys. Algonquian-speaking

peoples of New England used the bearberry (*Arctostaphylus uva ursi*) to treat scurvy, but most settlers ignored such remedies because they perceived American Indians to be savages, although Native practices were superior to those of the Europeans, who were still mired in Galenic (Medieval) medicine.[21]

Herbalism, based on traditional Indigenous plant remedies and their modern applications, is becoming increasingly valuable, however, in the practice of **holistic medicine** worldwide.[22] Improved treatments for many of the chronic diseases that affect Western societies today—heart disease, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's, and obesity—can be found through a whole-body approach to healing, focusing on disease symptoms, nutrition, and psychological wellness. Plants, including herbs, are a primary focus of holistic medicine.

As will be demonstrated in the following section, biomedicine, as we understand it today, grew out of humoral pathology and Medieval practices.

Humoral pathology and the rise of Western biomedicine

Humoral Pathology is based on the Greek theory of the *four elements* (earth, air, fire, water) and the parallel concept of the *four qualities* (hot, cold, dry, moist). Since there were different medical schools in ancient Greece (Cos, Pythagorean, etc.), the four elements and qualities were independently conceived but were synthesized by the time of Hippocrates (born ca. 460 BCE). Combining the four elements with the four qualities produces the *four humors*: Blood—hot and moist; Phlegm—cold and moist; Black Bile—or "melancholy," cold and dry; Yellow Bile or "choler," hot and dry.

Hippocrates believed that the human body contains these four humors and that all have to be in correct proportions to one another (equilibrium) for good health. An excess or deficiency of one or the other causes discomfort and/or sickness. Hippocrates also perceived a seasonal variation of the four humors: Winter—phlegm (cold/moist) is at its highest level; Spring—blood (hot/moist) increases due to wet/warm days; Summer—yellow bile (hot/dry); the blood remains strong but is mixed with bile; Fall—black bile (cold/dry); the coolness of autumn cools the bile, so that it turns black (Figure 11.8).

In conjunction with the seasons, certain diseases are found at particular times of the year. Each disease has to be treated by the principles of

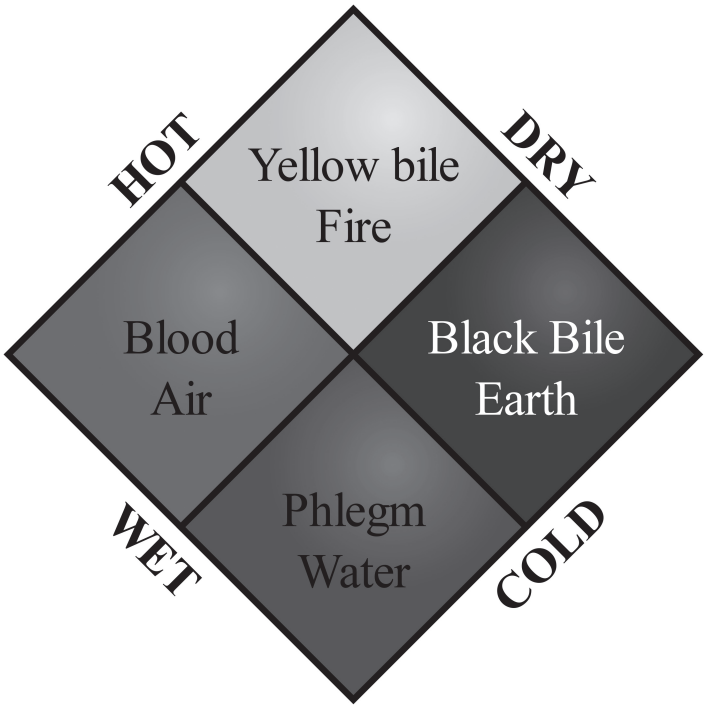

Figure 11.8 Humoral pathology chart; Hippocrates believed that the body contains these four humors, and they must be balanced for health.

Source: Wikimedia

opposition. For example, overeating is balanced by fasting; starvation by eating; indolence by activity; exhaustion by rest, etc. The major body organs also have certain characteristics: Heart—dry/hot; Brain—moist/cold; Liver—moist/hot.

The normal body has an excess of moisture and heat. Moreover, based on individual personality and character, people have certain temperaments, or "complexions": Sanguine—cheerful and optimistic; Phlegmatic—calm, composed, sluggish, apathetic; Bilious—choleric (angry), ill-tempered; Melancholic—depressed, sad, melancholy.

Knowing the disposition of the patient, the excess or lack of humors in the patient, the ancient Greek physician could determine the course of treatment: diet, herbal medicines, purging, vomiting, bleeding, or cupping. Scholars of the history of medicine sometimes refer to these treatments as puke, purge, and bleed.[23]

The historical diffusion of humoral pathology from Greece began with the famous Greek physician *Galen* (ca. 130–200 CE), who lived and worked in Rome. Galen transcribed notes and anecdotes from Hippocrates' students and published them as the *Hippocratic Corpus*. Galen's writings influenced medical practices in the Byzantine civilization, so humoral pathology spread to Constantinople and then to Asia Minor, where it was adopted by Eastern Christians and Muslims. Through conquest, the Moors brought the system to Spain, Italy, and the north coast of Africa. Humoral pathology dominated Medieval Christian medicine. It then traveled to the Western Hemisphere with the Spanish conquistadors, where it blended with the medical beliefs of the Mayas and Aztecs. (Some scholars believe the hot/cold dichotomy already existed in Native belief systems.) The refined model lost the concepts of moist and dry yet retained the hot/cold dichotomy, which sounds logical if humoral pathology is blended with Native explanatory models.[24]

Despite cultural rebirth in Renaissance Europe and advancements in the arts and sciences, humoral pathology and its practitioners—including quacks, astrologers, and bloodletters—flourished.[25] Beyond established medicine and *alchemy*—the attempt to turn base metals into gold, the precursor of chemistry—lay people depended on common magic carried over from Medieval times. Magical words or incantations were chanted during times of sickness, family problems, or crop failure. *Power objects* (crafted charms and fetishes) or *amulets* (natural objects like stones, plants, or animals) were carried or worn to provide protection from evil. Practitioners of folk, or popular, magic known as *cunning folk,* were sought for their skills in herbal medicine, midwifery, and assistance in helping people with a wide range of problems. They performed *imitative magic* based on the Law of Sympathy, *apotropaic practices* to ward off evil, and divination rites like augury (reading the actions of nonhuman agents) and cleromancy (casting stones or bones) in their practices (see Chapter 7). Cunning folk, especially women, were believed to have familiars or spirit helpers, usually cats. Their skills as herbalists and alleged ties to deadly and hallucinogenic plants like mandrake, belladonna, and henbane made them prime targets for witchcraft accusations beginning in the fifteenth century. Despite persecution by Church and state, folk medicine persisted.[26]

As early as the sixteenth century, the famed physician Vesalius (1514–1564), who instituted dissection at the University of Padua (northern Italy), found almost 200 errors in human anatomy and other mistakes in Galen's works based on translation errors of the original corpus (Figure 11.9). Nevertheless, Vesalius continued to practice humoral pathology, as did those who made great discoveries afterward. There is a saying in the history of Western medicine:

"Great discoveries don't strike like lightning bolts." In other words, great discoveries in the West typically go unnoticed for years, decades, and sometimes centuries.[27]

Figure 11.9 Vesalius (1514–1564), the Father of Modern Anatomy.
Source: Wikimedia

As mentioned earlier, treatment in humoral pathology centered on keeping the four humors in balance. Thus, when blood was considered to be in excess, academic physicians sent patients to an itinerant class of barber-surgeons for bleeding and scarification (see Box 11.2). Sixteenth-century practitioners believed that gunpowder poisoned the blood, so gunshot wounds were treated in a boiling "oil of elders," which caused tissue damage. By the seventeenth century, "the medical world was beginning to awaken from the long sleep induced by the opiate of Galenism." Despite the birth of empiricism and advancements in basic understanding of human anatomy and surgical procedures, humoral pathology remained the predominant medical practice; bleeding and cupping continued unabated.[28]

Eighteenth-century medicine was a continuation of past practices. Doctors were largely general practitioners, and surgeons were still largely inexperienced. In the first half of the nineteenth century, hospitals were nothing more than places of refuge for poor people who were sick, many of whom died there of mysterious infections. Not until surgical infections were better understood did teaching hospitals become centers of medical science. Nevertheless, explanations of infection were still founded in miasma theory, the belief that toxic fumes in the environment associated with fog, smoke, or mist created infections. Between 1860 and 1879, Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch, and Joseph Lister independently discovered the role of bacteria and purification in disease. Between 1880 and 1890, it was discovered

Box 11.2 Ancient symbols in Western medicine

In ancient Egypt, all deities were associated with some component of health or illness. *Ra*, the sun god, was the highest figure in the pantheon. *Isis*, a primal earth mother, was the goddess of healing for about 2,000 years. *Horus* was her son through her brother-husband *Osiris*. Another brother, the evil *Seth*, brought disease to humankind and then destroyed the eye of Horus. *Thoth*, the source of all knowledge and

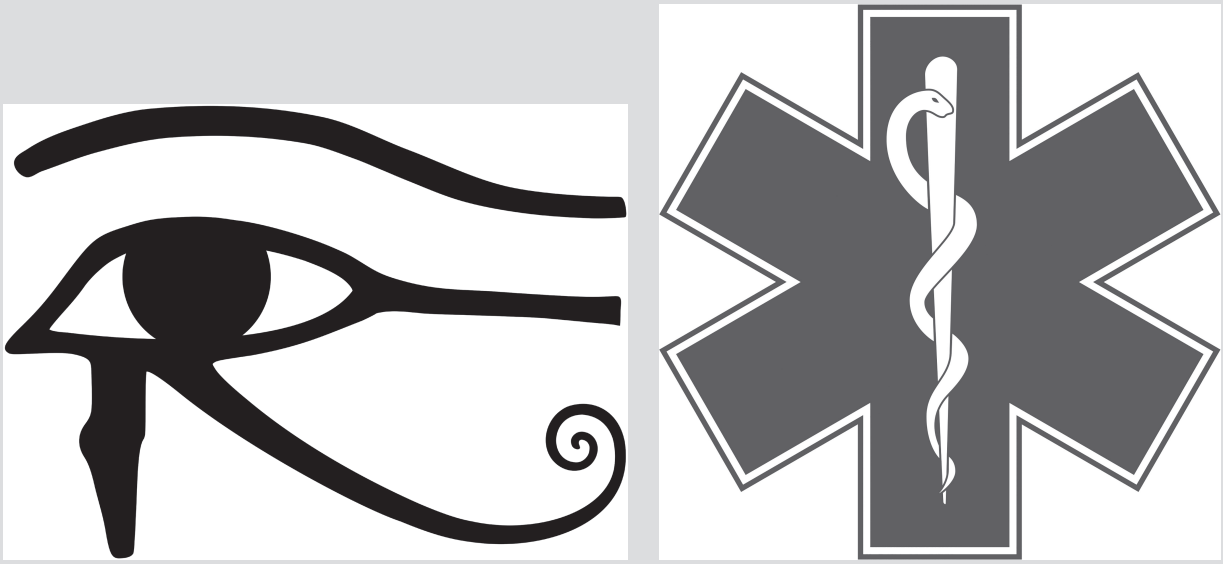

Figure 11.10 (a) Eye of Horus. (b) The Star of Life symbol.
Source: Wikimedia

Figure 11.11 Modern barber's pole; the design symbolizes blood and bandages used by barber-surgeons.
Source: Wikimedia

physician to the gods, healed the eye. Today, the symbol *Rx* for pharmacies derives from the symbol of the eye of Horus (Figure 11.10a).

The *Cult of Asclepius* was a religious sect during the era of pre-Hippocratic medicine. Snakes played a role in healing, as depicted by the staff or rod of Asclepius entwined by a serpent. The rod of Asclepius symbolizes today's scientific medicine. The symbol has been incorporated into the Star of Life logo seen on emergency services vehicles (Figure 11.10b). Healing temples associated with Asclepius originated in Thessaly in the sixth century BCE, and the cult became widespread by the fourth century BCE. Based on the power of snakes, the cult utilized trance, meditation, and dreams. In Greek mythology, Asclepius was ripped from his dying mother's womb as her body burned on a funeral pyre. Raised by the centaur Chiron, Asclepius learned the healing arts and became a master surgeon who saved lives and raised the dead. Descendants of Asclepius were known as the

Asclepiadae, which is also the name of the order of priests associated with the temples. Medical knowledge, sacred and secret, was passed down from father to son and protected by oath.

During the sixteenth century, there were three divisions of French medicine: academic physicians, a brotherhood of surgeons, and the *barber-surgeons*, itinerant bonesetters of the lowest class. Physicians ordered bleedings and scarification, for which they summoned barbers. The barber's pole we recognize today is a remnant of the red and white staff used to signify Medieval barber shops where barbers cut hair, pulled teeth, and performed bloodletting (Figure 11.11). The design was influenced by bloody bandages wrapped around the pole, which the patient held to promote freer bleeding.

that microscopic animal parasites, such as protozoa, cause widespread epidemics. This era also witnessed the introduction of preventive inoculation, or vaccines against viruses and bacteria, as recommended by Pasteur. The discovery of the protozoa causing malaria was a major breakthrough.[29]

Despite these and other advancements in scientific medicine, humoral pathology was the dominant model in Western medicine into the early twentieth century.

Humoral pathology in the North American colonies

Colonial medicine in North America paralleled European medical beliefs and practices and was dominated by religious doctrine. For instance, New England theologian Cotton Mather (1663–1728) perceived that sickness was caused by a wrathful God despite his experiments with hybridization and inoculation. Even elite colonial physicians perceived barbering as the best medicine, and bleeding was the major form of surgery. During the late seventeenth-century witchcraze in New England, doctors helped put witches to death. Large-scale quackery and polypharmacy (patients administered multiple prescriptions) resulted in numerous deaths, which prompted Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) to warn the public about dispensaries.

During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Army was plagued by poor hygiene and widespread gangrene. Opium and rum were used as painkillers for amputations, and the stumps were cauterized and bandaged. Following the war, Benjamin Rush (1745–1813), the leading American physician interested in psychological disorders, was known more for his teachings than his practice. He blamed the 1793 Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic on the harsh fumes blowing over the city from public dumps (miasma theory). Others blamed the epidemic on foreigners (xenophobia). Over 4,000 people died, and many survivors abandoned the nation's capital. Advice from the College of Physicians was to avoid ill people and to avoid the evening air. Rush suggested chewing garlic.

In 1847, the American Medical Association was established, then incorporated in 1897. Despite its founding, though, mid-nineteenth-century life was better on the East Coast, where medical reforms were made by public health boards, compared to the frontiers, where public health measures were often lacking. Traveling medicine shows peddled prescriptions like recipes, although American Indian remedies were heavily relied upon and

were undoubtedly better. Despite the advancement of hospitals in the nineteenth century, bloodletting was widespread, as was prescribing *calomel*—mercurous chloride, a white tasteless powder—as a purgative and fungicide.

Today's scientific medicine (biomedicine) did not come of age until the late 1920s and 1930s with the advent of antibiotics and penicillin (Western "magic"). Those who lived in the first half of the twentieth century retained some vestiges of this system and took medicines like camphor and castor oil. Those plagued by syphilis were treated with doses of mercury. (Medical students were admonished with the sage wisdom that a night with Venus could lead to a year with Mercury!)[30]

Western medicine slowly came of age after Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin mold in a Petri dish of Staphylococcus in 1928. Before this, arsenicals and sulphonamides were used to treat bacterial infections. Bloodletting—a typical treatment in Western humoral pathology—and calomel continued to be the most popular practices. Penicillin—a group of derivative antibiotics from *Penicillium* fungi—led to further discovery of *antibiotics*. Initially, penicillin antibiotics were successfully used to treat staphylococcal and streptococcal bacterial infections. Successful applications of penicillin occurred on the eve of World War II. In July 1943, mass-produced penicillin was first shipped to soldiers in the European theatre. Penicillin was considered a wonder drug, although its effectiveness today is thwarted by overuse.

Professionalism and credentialing associated with medical schools developed after World War II and remain a predominant theme in Western society today. Claiming a body of knowledge and skill and the ability to recruit other people and control the profession are important. Regarding the socioeconomic and environmental aspects of medicine, fewer people at the turn of the last century were involved in farming. Hence, a demographic change in employment and an increased impetus for the proliferation of education came into being with population growth, especially during the baby boom following World War II. As medicine became professionalized, its mystification through education became directly proportional to its exclusivity. Biomedicine cornered the monopoly of medical systems and remains the dominant institutional medical model in the United States today, although more traditional forms of healing are becoming increasingly visible, and many individuals are seeking alternative treatments for chronic disease. The hospital has become the focus of the physician's practice in the United States, while the home kitchen is a focus of many alternative medical therapies.

Despite the rise of Western medicine and its professionalization in the 1940s, vestiges of medical beliefs and practices from the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Medieval Europe are extant today in symbols on pharmacy façades, ambulances, and barber shops.

In Western society, sympathy and compassion are often lacking for those who suffer—especially the homeless and those with stigmatized diseases. Whereas hospitals isolate the patient from the family, practitioners in traditional societies attempt to restore the individual back to the family as an immediate part of treatment. Hospitals separate us from important life cycle rituals because most of us are born in hospitals, and many die in them as well; these rituals used to occur at home.

Today, many Westerners assume that biomedicine is superior to practices in small-scale societies. Medical anthropologists George Foster and Barbara Anderson observe:

> Westerners are highly ethnocentric; we assume that the superiority of our civilization over technologically less complex societies is obvious, and we assume that, given the

> chance, peoples in "less fortunate" countries would like to adopt our ways. Western medical personnel have been, if anything, even more ethnocentric about the superiority of scientific medicine, finding it difficult to believe—despite evidence to the contrary—that given the opportunity, all peoples will not accept it in its totality.[31]

Many Westerners are ethnocentric about medical practices outside of biomedicine, except occasionally for a few alternative and complementary practices—but our explanatory models of disease causation are often flawed and based on stereotypes, especially about Indigenous peoples, as represented by the smallpox blanket myth.

The smallpox blanket myth

In Chapter 3, we asserted that assumptions about Indigenous cultures are often based on unproven collective beliefs, the things that "everybody knows are true" but are based on stereotypes or lack of evidence.[32] For instance, there were many unwarranted claims that COVID-19 vaccines are untrustworthy because they were developed too quickly or that they believe they have unwanted side effects: infertility in women, altered DNA, and even swollen testicles. Despite the anti-vaccination movement, however, many people trust the science (even though we do not always understand how it works) of the new vaccines and have been immunized—some multiple times.

Scholars and other professionals are not immune to making false assumptions without the due diligence of good research. For example, some claim that Inuits have hundreds of words for snow because the harsh Arctic environment produces innumerable forms of snow and ice. Weather forecasters on local TV stations are the biggest culprits for spreading this falsehood. Few, however, know that Franz Boas identified four Inuit snow terms in a 1911 publication: *aput*, "snow on the ground"; *qana*, "falling snow"; *piqsirpoq*, "drifting snow"; *qimuqsuq*, "snowdrift."[33] Perhaps your local weather reporter, too, will mention the erroneous hundreds of "Eskimo" snow terms during the next big snowstorm![34]

A more egregious stereotype, though, is the smallpox blanket myth, a time-worn meme about soldiers and settler-colonists deliberately plying American Indian communities with scab-laden blankets. Before its eradication in the late 1970s, smallpox was mostly transmitted face-to-face through the inhalation of airborne variola droplets and sometimes through contact with objects infected by body fluids. After exposure, a ten to 14-day non-contagious incubation period led to the onset of symptoms—fever, malaise, vomiting, body aches, back pain—for two to four days, followed by lesions on the tongue, mouth, and throat. By this time, the victim was highly contagious. Oral lesions spread from the mouth to the entire body and were densest on the face, arms, and legs. Delirium and coma during this stage led to mortality in 30 to 40 percent of smallpox victims. For those who survived, their pustules formed scabs that fell off within ten days; at this point, they were no longer contagious and were immune to further outbreaks.

Following the 9/11 attacks on America, threats—real or perceived—about biological weapons like anthrax spread through the news media. About that time, the smallpox blanket myth gained new life. Since then, authors, artists, theater performers, public speakers, and even scholars have perpetuated the myth that settler-colonists purposely

orchestrated biological warfare through the distribution of scab-infested blankets to American Indians.

The smallpox blanket myth originated in July 1763 during Pontiac's War. At the conclusion of the French and Indian War, discontented Natives in the Great Lakes region attacked or laid siege to vacated French forts and settlements reoccupied by British soldiers. During the subsequent siege of Fort Pitt, correspondence between Major General Jeffery Amherst and a subordinate officer reveals their genocidal intent. Pitt's subordinate confirmed that he would implement the scheme to "Innoculate the Indians by means of Blanketts." Other correspondence reifies that British officers desired to unleash germ warfare on Indigenous populations. However, no documentation exists that verifies if these heinous plans were ever carried out. Alex Álvarez asserts that had Amherst and his cohorts successfully executed their plan, they would have written about their success or failure to do so. "It's doubtful that the truth will ever be known."[35] Historian Paul Kelton concurs:

> Scholars should be very cautious in bandying about claims that Europeans and Euro-Americans frequently used smallpox-laden blankets to advance their imperial goals. The quest to find evidence of such forms of biological warfare embarks one on a quest of futility.[36]

Unfortunately, such unfounded explanatory models of illness continue to be perpetuated.

Negotiating medical models in clinical settings

Medical anthropologist Thomas M. Johnson once said, "Biomedicine is the best medical system in the world, but the problems are with the culture of medicine."[37] In other words, many practitioners are unaware that patients' behaviors are culturally conditioned. The inability to recognize cultural and religious behaviors in clinical settings often leads to misunderstandings and ineffective treatment. Hence, the importance of anthropologists working in clinical settings.

Arthur Kleinman pioneered *clinical anthropology* by establishing mechanisms in which anthropologists and physicians can collaborate. Today, some cultural anthropologists specialize in *medical anthropology* and consult in hospital settings. Where possible, they teach physicians and medical students that culture is the blueprint for behavior and that it is important to understand culturally constructed behavior in the clinical setting. As patient advocates, anthropologists stress that patient needs are best served through culturally sensitive health care.

Explanatory models, the disease/illness dichotomy, and the importance of negotiation in physician-patient relationships are taught in some medical schools today. Anthropologists and physicians are both socialized into their professions, though doctors confront life-and-death situations. They have a unique socialization process, know their way around hospitals, and expect those who work with them, especially medical anthropologists, to have the same knowledge. Doctors have shared backgrounds, and they have a restricted education the more they become specialized. In terms of communication, when doctors are in their specialized roles, it is sometimes difficult to communicate with those outside

of their specialty. Many physicians also cannot pick up non-verbal cues and signals when patients are troubled. Anthropologists working in clinical settings must understand the *culture of medicine*.

Anthropologists collaborating with doctors must be communicators, mediators, and *cultural brokers*. Recommendations are carefully made. Medical anthropologists are *patient advocates*, using knowledge about a patient's cultural beliefs and values to interpret Western medicine for them. Moreover, they often have to explain the apparently irrational behavior of patients to Western physicians. Anthropologists take the middle ground between the culture of the patient and the culture of Western medicine. In many cases, misunderstandings can be qualified in terms acceptable to both parties to bring about better health care for the patient, as seen in the Dallas case study.[38]

An American Indian patient in Parkland Hospital was deemed problematic by the medical staff following her detox from acute and chronic alcoholism. Her uncooperativeness, unconventional non-verbal behavior and seemingly bizarre religious beliefs confounded the Western-trained psychiatrists and psychologists. For instance, when they introduced themselves to her, they noted that her handshake was limp and that she did not make direct eye contact. Moreover, she cried a lot and fought with the nurses. To make matters worse, Indian friends brought her a Bible, an eagle feather, and a bag of dirt, which she was seen eating. The doctor in charge thought she had incurred irreparable psychomotor damage from years of alcohol abuse and prepared to send her to the state mental hospital.

During grand rounds by the Consultation Liaison Psychiatric Unit, her case was discussed by psychologists, an American Indian psychiatrist, a medical anthropologist, and several urban Indians. The latter informed the doctors that her culturally prescribed behavior was perfectly normal within the parameters of her culture. Next, everyone visited the patient in her room and learned that she grew up in a distant reservation community where she had little contact with non-Indians until she attended a boarding school, where she had been abused. This explained her uncooperativeness with medical staff in an institutionalized setting. According to the implicit and tacit rules of her culture, maintaining direct eye contact with an adult of the opposite sex could be construed as sexual promiscuity. Moreover, shaking hands is not part of her cultural baggage. In the West, a person's character is judged by firm, strong handshakes and directness of eye contact; people with limp handshakes and an aversion to direct eye contact are considered untrustworthy. In traditional American Indian cultures, the accumulation of different medicine powers is normal, so Bibles and eagle feathers are not conflicting symbols. She said that eating the dirt allowed her to connect with her traditional homeland and that her incessant crying stemmed from the guilt she felt for not living up to the expectations of her tribal elders, who did not approve of her drinking. Once her version of reality was compared to that of the doctors, both sides understood one another a little better.

At the conclusion of the bedside meeting, it was agreed that one of the Indians in attendance, a shaman, would personally take her to a Native-run rehabilitation center following her discharge from Parkland. Despite differences in explanatory models, the negotiation of medical models benefited the patient and prevented her from being warehoused in a state mental hospital.

The Parkland Hospital case study demonstrates the importance of negotiating explanatory models and that culturally sensitive health care can bring about better health care for patients. Even people in Western society often need liaisons to help them navigate the health care network. Anthropologists are intrigued by the decisions made by family members seeking therapy in medically pluralistic societies where there are choices between Western and Indigenous therapies.

Faith and the biomedical approach

In the previous sections, we examined the interplay of spiritual belief and healing in the personalistic and naturalistic (humoral) medical systems. Yet the allopathic biomedical approach (Western science) has connections to religion as well. Most hospitals honor requests for religious diets or special religious meals, sacred religious texts, and even religious items, including Buddhist *mala* prayer beads, Catholic rosaries, Jewish Sabbath candles, and Muslim *sajajid* (prayer rugs).

Across cultures, in hospital and clinical settings, it is also common to find small chapels, meditation gardens, and labyrinths. Not only are these religious places[39] architecturally grafted onto many clinical environments, but, at times, religious specialists are included on staff with medical practitioners. Commonly provided to the patients and their families, these resources are sometimes critically important to the medical specialists as well.

Spiritual architecture in the biomedical environment

Increasingly today, we find designated sacred places within clinical settings. These may be secluded, open, or even for multiple uses, but they are often also marked as public places, areas where patients, families, and others can access a *spiritual experience*. Why might religious experiences be included in biomedical settings where scientific approaches are used for healing?

Architect Julio Bermúdez studies the cognitive-aesthetic effects of sacred architecture on human biology (referred to as *neurophenomenology*). In his research of 30 practicing Roman Catholics who visited two very different places—Union Train Station and the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.—Bermúdez found that sacred places produce *distinct* biometric effects in those he refers to as "believers." Using a mobile EEG machine and biosensor wristbands, Bermúdez mapped physiological responses such as brain waves, heart rate, blood pressure, eye movements, and skin conductance and found "gamma activity increased across the brain. There was also higher activation of the frontal lobe, indicating intense focus and a disruption of default thinking."[40] Sacred places produce altered states. We have long known this emotionally and psychologically, which is why chapels are commonly associated with hospitals, but research such as Bermúdez's suggests that biology may play an even more powerful role.

Chapels are commonly found in hospital settings. If the hospital is religiously affiliated, the chapel may be specifically designed to align with a designated religious tradition, while in hospitals not religiously affiliated, the chapel will usually be less symbolically defined. However, it is most common that these spaces are considered nondenominational and open to anyone for prayer, meditation, and solace, no matter what their religious roots or affiliations might or might not be. Occasionally, clinic or hospital chapels are even used

for weddings—among the many cases of those who have married at a hospital are stories of personnel who have met in the hospital and many more stories of a patient facing life-threatening health conditions or at an end stage of their life, wishing to be married.[41]

The labyrinth

The **labyrinth** is a spiritual tool—a path, most often in the form of a circle, which invites those who walk it[42] to travel contemplatively as if on a pilgrimage. One of the most famous labyrinths is at Chartres Cathedral in France, inlaid intricately into the floor of the central nave of this Catholic church. While the design of the labyrinth is at least 4,000 years old and has been discovered on petroglyphs in Spain and India and on pottery, coins, and Roman mosaics, it has only recently been re-introduced as a spiritual tool for meditation, prayer, and self-transformation.[43]

By the late 1990s, labyrinths began being adapted for use as therapeutic tools in hospitals and other healthcare environments, including in nursing schools where students were learning self-care as part of their medical training (Figure 11.12). Today, labyrinths are commonly found at hospitals and other medical facilities.

Figure 11.12 Santa Rosa labyrinth at the Nursing Building, Carrollton, Georgia; although designated for Nursing students, in this photo, cultural anthropology students are walking and plotting the labyrinth as part of an ethnographic field methods class.

Source: Photo courtesy of M. Daniel, University of West Georgia

Religious specialists in biomedical environments

We think of medical staff as doctors, nurses, aides, and therapists, but religious specialists are also often part of many medical communities. Religiously-affiliated medical facilities are ancient, some of the earliest ones established during the Middle Ages, and affiliated with Islam (called *dar al-shifa* or *bimaristans*) and Catholicism. The *medical arts*, as they were called, were highly developed in the Islamic world, specifically in Egypt and Persia (modern-day Iraq and Iran), primarily based on passages in the Qur'an in which the Prophet Mohammed referred to health as a divine blessing and called for healthcare as a basic right for all people.

Today, in *biomedical* religiously-affiliated medical facilities, religious leaders themselves may be part of the medical staff (e.g., pastors, priests, rabbis, etc.), but most often, we find a group referred to as **chaplains**, individuals who are certified by a specific religious group to provide

spiritual guidance and support in secular institutions. We find chaplains in the armed services, educational institutions, correctional facilities, nursing homes, mental health facilities, and hospitals. In these settings, including hospitals, the chaplain will conduct religious services; administer sacraments—including Last Rites; offer pastoral counseling on related issues, such as healthcare decisions, grieving, faith, and compassion; serve as an intermediary between the patient, family, and other medical staff; and pray on behalf of those requesting support.

For many individuals—patients, family, and friends—it is the chaplain who will get to know them individually, hear their deepest worries and fears, and minister to them while they are there. Because chaplains are part of the medical staff at hospitals, they tend to be available far more readily than a personal religious leader who has responsibilities in and outside the hospital setting. A group of chaplains is on duty at most U.S. hospitals 24 hours a day, and it is not unusual for a patient or family member to call a chaplain, who usually conducts rounds just as do doctors and nurses, at any hour of the day or night.

Just as we saw with altered states of consciousness and the medical systems discussed earlier in this chapter, the *efficacy of belief* is a powerful force in human lives, regardless of the context. Whether in a person's home, in a church, or even especially in a hospital, faith and belief are cornerstones to healing and health.

Conclusion

The interface of magic, religion, and medicine is of interest to anthropologists who specialize in **medical anthropology**, the cross-cultural study of medical systems. Of particular interest to medical anthropologists are people's beliefs and values as they confront illness and death. Every culture has explanatory models that explain why or how people get sick and whether or not therapy should be sought.

Medical anthropology came into being after World War II during the Marshall Plan, which was developed in 1947 when Secretary of State George C. Marshall allocated $17 billion to rebuild war-torn Europe. Though separate from the Marshall Plan, monies were also allocated to help Asian countries ravished by the war, including Indonesia, China, and the Philippines. The rise of **applied anthropology**—using anthropologically gained knowledge about a culture to help people within that culture—came about around the same time. (Medical anthropology is a specialized area within applied anthropology.)

It is noteworthy that *faith healing*, characteristic of the charismatic Christian sects and other religious systems, is very similar to shamanic practices. Jim Jones, founder of the People's Temple, led over 700 followers to commit suicide from drinking cyanide-laced Kool-Aid in Guiana in November 1978. He had used magical tricks to "cure" members of the audience who came to see him when the Temple was in California. Some of these religious sects perform exorcisms and various types of faith healing. Years ago, a former cameraperson for a TV evangelist said that people faked being healed about 50 percent of the time, but she indicated that about 50 percent of the healings seemed genuine.

Summary

Magic, medicine, and religion coalesce in the therapeutic setting as individuals and families are compelled to make therapeutic decisions when confronting illness and death. In

any culture, medical beliefs are subsumed into the larger category of religious beliefs. Even though most of us are ignorant of the pharmacological effects of modern medicine, we still seek their magical efficacy.

Arthur Kleinman presents explanatory models through the disease/illness dichotomy. *Disease* is the etic model of Western medicine, whereas *illness* pertains to culturally and individually constructed emic models. Whereas Western practitioners focus on *how* symptoms occurred, cultural models stress *why* they happened. In other words, who or what was offended, or what tabus were broken? Despite their differences, diagnosis and prognosis are important. Non-Western societies are socio-centric because families and communities care for patients, whereas Western societies that are ego-centric isolate patients in hospitals. Anthropologists who work in clinical settings understand the importance of negotiating medical models to provide culturally sensitive healthcare.

George Foster and Barbara Anderson contend that medical beliefs and practices in non-Western or traditional societies are either *personalistic* or *naturalistic*. In personalistic systems, illness is purposely caused by *sensate* agents like sorcerers, ancestors, and ghosts. Personalistic medical systems are found in Indigenous societies. Shamans and other traditional healers are summoned for diagnosis and treatment.

Illness in naturalistic systems has nothing to do with sorcerers, supernatural agents, or malice. Naturalistic medical models are impersonal, systemic systems characterized by equilibrium, or balance of *insensate* agents, e.g., hot/cold, yin/yang, or humors. Imbalance causing illness is associated with eating the wrong foods, changes in temperature, strong winds, or other factors.

Although Western medicine came of age in the 1940s, vestiges of ancient medical beliefs are apparent in symbols associated with pharmacies, ambulances, and barbershops. Today, associated with Western biomedical facilities, we increasingly find access to religious and spiritual resources, including things such as chapels, contemplative spaces, labyrinths, and spiritual staff, such as *chaplains*.

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Study questions

1. Describe why magic, religion, and medicine cannot be separated.
2. What are explanatory models? How do these vary across cultures?
3. Discuss the disease/illness dichotomy. What are some non-Western explanatory models of illness? How do they clash or complement Western models?
4. Can you identify practitioners in the personal, folk, and professional sectors in your community? How do their roles differ?
5. Compare and contrast personalistic and naturalistic medical models.
6. Can you identify any other ancient symbols used in Western medicine today?
7. Why do you think belief plays such an important role in healing?

Notes

1 The terminology for this disease includes HIV (virus) and AIDS (immune disease caused by HIV).
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4 Ibid., p. 53.
5 Ibid., pp. 53–58.
6 World Health Organization, *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy: 2014–2023* (Geneva: WHO, 2013), p. 27.
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8 G. Foster and B. Anderson, *Medical Anthropology* (New York: John Wiley & Sons), p. 53.
9 Ibid., p. 53.
10 Ibid., pp. 53–54.
11 Ibid., p. 56.
12 Ibid., p. 54.
13 W.H. Howells, *The Heathens: Primitive Man and His Religions* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1948), pp. 92–95.
14 B.R. Kracht, *Kiowa Belief and Ritual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 31.
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16 Better Health Channel, www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/placebo-effect
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20 R. Arvigo and M. Balick, *Rainforest Remedies: One Hundred Healing Herbs of Belize* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 1993), p. 195.
21 Vogel, pp. 3–4.
22 Many colleges and universities in the U.S. offer degrees in herbalism and there has been a significant growth of dedicated "herbalism schools" over the last decade.
23 Foster and Anderson, pp. 56–57.
24 Ibid., pp. 58–59.
25 Many scholars believe the Renaissance began in Italy following the end of the Black Death in 1351, then spread throughout Western Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
26 T. Cussans, J. Farndon, A. Kay, and P. Parker, *A History of Magic, Witchcraft, and the Occult* (New York: DK Publishing, 2020), pp. 92–93, 124–127, 208–209.
27 S.B. Nuland, *Doctors: The Biography of Medicine* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1988), pp. 61, 75–76, 79–81.
28 Ibid., pp. 96–98, 135.
29 Ibid., pp. 239–240, 245, 301, 362–364, 367–368.
30 Ibid., p. 184.
31 Foster and Anderson, p. 224.
32 Remember that "myth" has several meanings. Usage here does not imply sacred narratives of creation, but false narratives based on stereotypes.

33 F. Boas, "Introduction." In *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Book reprint, 1966), pp. 21–22.
34 Many non-Indigenous people remain unaware that "Eskimo" is a pejorative term, a racial slur—Inuit is the preferred term today.
35 A. Álvarez, *Native America and the Question of Genocide* (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2014), pp. 88–90.
36 P. Kelton, *Cherokee Medicine, Colonial Germs: An Indigenous Nation's Fight against Smallpox, 1518–1824* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), pp. 102–106, 136.
37 Class notes, Health Care Organization, Thomas M. Johnson, Southern Methodist University, Spring 1983.
38 B. Kracht, "Urbanization and American Indian Health: A Case Study in Dallas, Texas." *High Plains Applied Anthropologist* 13(Spring):68–77, 1993.
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42 Some individuals walk the labyrinth on their knees as a form of reverence and repentance.
43 J. Sellers and B. Moss, eds., *Learning with the Labyrinth: Creating Reflective Space in Higher Education* (London: Palgrave, 2016). Note that labyrinths and mazes are usually distinct in form and purposes.

Chapter 12

The search for new meaning

Culture change is inevitable, as witnessed by world history. The last 500-plus years, however, have been distinguished by the European colonization of the Americas, Africa, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. As a result of colonialization, imperialism, global trade, warfare, migration, and generational changes, among many other factors, societies change and adapt in response to external and internal pressures. Through an examination of world history, there are numerous examples of **revitalization movements**, conscious attempts "to reinstitute the traditional cultural values and beliefs of a group faced with dramatic changes."[1] They are movements where people try to preserve lifeways that are rapidly vanishing and are an attempt to "reconstitute a destroyed but not forgotten way of life."[2] Participants in revitalization movements are also attempting to bring about change in their society.

Smithsonian Institution ethnologist James Mooney was the first to investigate a North American revitalization movement—the Great Plains Ghost Dance (see further on)—which anthropologist Ralph Linton later identified as a *nativistic movement*: "Any conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture." Linton suggested "that certain current or remembered elements of culture are selected for emphasis and given symbolic value,"[3] which is compatible with current thoughts about the "ideological manipulation of heritage."[4] After the publication of the seminal Anthony F.C. Wallace article, "Revitalization Movements" in 1956, anthropologists began focusing on revitalization movements among Indigenous populations in Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, and Pacific Islands, where, in the context of Western settler colonialism, Natives have been subjected to and oppressed by colonial rule. Following Wallace's lead article, many scholarly works have emphasized *stress* and cultural *deprivation* in the analyses of classic revitalization movements.

Recent reinterpretations of the revitalization paradigm suggest that deprivation models best describe historical or classic revitalization movements, though anthropologist Michael Harkin believes that deprivation "is only one possible state of relations between aboriginal groups and colonial societies. Other relations include parity and ascendancy." Furthermore, it is the movement between states "rather than the absolute state, that will stimulate revitalization. Thus, a movement from deprivation to parity or ascendancy may provoke revitalization, just as the reverse trajectory did."[5] Instead of attributing revitalization movements as responses only to deprivation and stress, Harkin's all-inclusive model

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also pertains to modern-day cultural revivals: gaming, the invention of tradition, language revival, healing, ethnomedicine, massage therapy, and Indigenized Christianity.

In the following section, we will examine classic revitalization movements, including Vodou, Santería, Cargo Cults, Mormonism, and the Ghost Dance, then look at a modern-day localized cultural revival among Mayas in Belize and the global rise of religious fundamentalism in Christianity and Islam as revivalistic movements. First, an inspection of the literature reveals some of the major behavioral characteristics of classic revitalization movements.

Classic revitalization movements

British social anthropologist Victor Turner began ethnographic fieldwork among the Ndembus (Congo culture area) in the early 1950s, where he observed how interest in "Western individualism" had caused many "tribal religions [to] wilt and perish in a surprisingly short time, and with them vanished the ritual symbols." Colonizers, the "new social order," had introduced new symbols, along with social cohesion and instability; however, once rapid social change slowed down and stabilized, traditional rituals were revived and infused with some of the new symbols. Importantly, Turner noted that restored Ndembu rituals were hybridized with new and old ritual symbols, making it difficult for him to separate "traditional from new social tendencies in . . . Ndembu behavior."[6] Like others that occur during revitalization movements, these rituals represent "a collection of world views in flux."[7]

The phenomenon Turner observed is now referred to as *religious syncretism*. By definition, syncretism is the blending of beliefs and values from two or more cultures. (Note that in syncretism, cultures do not blend together, but *ideas do* as they are borrowed and integrated among cultures.) Turner suggested that rapid culture change creates periods of social adjustment where people are compelled to maintain cultural identity through adaptation, accommodation, and innovation. Syncretism occurs when diverse symbols come together in new religions. Thus, *syncretic integration* occurs when "traditional and innovative" patterns or symbols fuse together. The syncretic blending of vastly different cultural beliefs and values is often characterized by social conflict and ideological competition.

Deprivation models have dominated studies of Indigenous revitalization movements. For instance, historian Wilbur Jacobs used this model to examine revitalization movements in Melanesia and Native North America based on **acculturation**, the process whereby a culture is modified by traits from a dominant society. To Jacobs, acculturation has two meanings: first, it is a two-way cultural exchange after first contact, where each group borrows ideas or items of material culture from one another (e.g., American Indians appreciated firearms and steel, whereas cotton, corn, and tobacco were rapidly incorporated into European cultures); second, during the process of settler colonialism, acculturation becomes a one-sided affair in which the colonizers expect the Indigenous peoples to abandon polygamy, communalism, and Native rites in favor of monogamy, individualism, and Christianity. Missionaries and government officials typically are the agents of acculturative pressures. Jacobs' model recognizes three acculturative stages:

1. Initial contact with congenial relationships strengthened by gift giving and trade, gives way to overt hostilities and warfare when Europeans begin encroaching on Indigenous

lands. Warfare results in the "defeat of the natives, their bewilderment, and a loss of respect for their culture." Epidemic diseases introduced during initial contact continue to depopulate local Native peoples. In the Americas, during initial European colonial contact, Indigenous populations decreased by 90 percent (cumulatively and collectively).
2. Settler colonialism ushers in an "era of depopulation and despondence" through continued episodes of viral and bacterial infections, alcoholism, leadership vacuums, and further loss of lands. Colonial administrators and missionaries attempt to teach the Native peoples to devalue their own languages and customs.
3. Finally, an era of contra-acculturation emerges in which the Natives "tend to revive their cultures in modified form with renewed appreciation of their own arts, crafts, and rituals." Revitalization movements typically appear during this stage.[8]

Revitalization movements are sometimes called *nationalistic movements* when subordinated groups are expected to abandon their customs in favor of those of the colonizers. Depopulation and discrimination by the dominant group produce cultural disruption and breakdown of ethnic or tribal social organization. Members of the subordinate group are thus reverted to a "marginal" status in the new social order. According to Jacobs' model, prolonged discrimination leads to "group unity and solidarity" among the "marginal persons" who resent their subordinate status.

Anthropologist James Slotkin also interpreted revitalization movements based on stress and deprivation models. Accordingly, the oppressed attempt to change their relative status to the dominant group through *nationalism*, a social movement designed to "overthrow the domination-subordination" relation by two different means:

1. Socially, through militant nationalism, where social means are used to achieve a new social status. This implies that societal institutions, e.g., military, political, economic, and religious, are utilized. Violence usually accompanies this type of social movement. This model applies to many militant groups, such as the Taliban.
2. Culturally, by manipulating cultural symbols created to oppose the dominant group. *Nativistic nationalism* is a type of revitalization movement featuring syncretic symbols, in which acculturation brings about irreversible cultural change that makes it "impossible to revive the traditional culture":[9]

Furthermore,

> In addition to this changed culture pattern, some persisting traditional customs are continued, others previously discarded are revived, and innovations are adopted which seem symbolic of that ethnic group. Customs forced upon it by the dominant ethnic group . . . are discarded, as well as other customs which seem symbolic of the dominant group.

Nativistic nationalism, a form of revitalization, often begins as a new religious movement among those oppressed by a dominant, non-Native group. Oftentimes, revitalization movements, such as these, are short-lived and end in violence, as in the case of Nock-ay-det-klinne, a

Cibecue Apache known as the Dreamer. By 1880, Apaches living on the San Carlos reserve in southeastern Arizona were dying from fevers and food shortages while their corrupt agent sold their rations to Mexicans and had ghost employees on the agency payroll. Around this time, the Dreamer claimed that he died and traveled to the spirit world, where he visited deceased ancestors and saw plentiful game (very similar to the Ghost Dance doctrine). Nock-ay-det-klinne began sponsoring dances in which the spirits of great Apache leaders—Mangas Coloradas, Vitorio, and Cochise—were summoned to drive away the White Eyes. When questioned, the Dreamer informed the new agent that his dance was peaceful, but shortly afterward, the U.S. Army took him into custody from his camp along Canyon Creek, where many Apaches flocked to his dances. Although he was not an overt threat, the Dreamer was promptly executed on August 20, 1881, when Apache scouts rebelled and began firing at the soldiers who held him hostage. Thus ended this brief revitalization movement.[10]

Revitalization movements are also called *transformative movements* because the constituents usually attempt to transform their low (or oppressed) position in the social order. The newly formed religions are often comprised of distressed individuals who feel helpless in the current social order; the movement awakens once apathetic and hopeless people and unites them with a common prophetic destiny. Prophesies feature syncretic symbols to project a "glorious future state" based on the "legends of a glorious past." Associated doctrines promise that everything affiliated with the dominant population will disappear by the "rebirth" of the oppressed people.[11]

Revitalization movement rituals can be extremely elaborate and founded in Indigenous ceremonialism or amorphous mass hysteria. Recall that rituals reflect the general attitudes of the performers, as well as the prescribed course of action to resolve problems. Outside observers, then, can learn the *ethos*, or religious values, through an examination of the ritual symbols, which reflect the deprivation and destitution felt by the performers.

In "Revitalization Movements," A.F.C. Wallace described six types of revitalization movements and characteristic behavioral patterns in each:

1. Nativistic movements are oriented towards eliminating the dominant culture.
2. Revivalistic movements attempt to revive cultural traditions from the past or those that are currently threatened.
3. **Cargo Cults** appear when Indigenous populations adopt "alien values, customs, and material" wealth (*cargo*). Many cargo cults appeared in early twentieth-century Melanesia.
4. Vitalistic movements involve the adoption of alien values and customs but without a singular focus on cargo as the mechanism for transformation.
5. Millenarian movements promise a "supernatural transformation of the world into some idealized state" or utopia.
6. Messianic movements involve a prophesied savior who will transform the world into an idealized state.

The six types of revitalization movements and associated behaviors are not mutually exclusive, so a particular movement can manifest many of these patterns.[12]

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all started as revitalization movements. Since their inception, they have featured millenarian and messianic characteristics. Within Christianity, revitalization movements have occurred since the Protestant Reformation in 1517, which led to the splintering of the Church into many different sects. And western New York during the early nineteenth century has been referred to as the "burned over" district, given the numerous millenarian and messianic movements that occurred there. Mormonism originated in western New York (see further on), as did the Handsome Lake religion among the Iroquois. Snake handlers in Appalachia also represent revitalization movements among the poor, and TV and online ministries often cater to religiously disaffected people, sometimes sparking a revitalization movement. Many revitalization movements have occurred in recent times, including Jim Jones and the People's Temple, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians (see further on), Moonies, or followers of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and more recently, the 2023 Asbury revival (Box 12.1).

Box 12.1 The Asbury revival

Figure 12.1 Hughes Auditorium at Asbury University in 2023.

Source: Wikimedia

On Wednesday, February 8, 2023, a group of "Gen Z" undergraduate students at Asbury University—a private Christian college in Wilmore, KY—attended a regularly scheduled morning worship convocation on the topic "love in action." As the service proceeded, various participants said that something seemed to change, that they felt "drawn by a spiritual presence they felt was at the event."[13] When the planned service concluded, about two dozen students remained, praying, and throughout the day, more Asbury students returned to Hughes Auditorium to pray (Figure 12.1), posting on social media sites that they were feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit in their gathering. Prayers focused on spiritual renewal—"life change, salvation, and re-dedication to Christ."[14]

By that Wednesday evening, this "Asbury Outpouring," as it was being called on TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms, was getting attention beyond the University, and Asbury President Kevin Brown issued a statement on social media that everyone,

everywhere, was "welcome to join" this powerful worship. At first, people trickled in from the immediate area, but as the local media covered what was happening—a multi-day sustained worship service—the University had to open other buildings on campus to house the overflow. Seminaries as far away as Virginia, Ohio, and Alabama began to take note of Asbury and responded by convening their own prayer vigils. On February 18, the crowds participating in the prayer vigil had grown to "tens of thousands." Concerned about the security and health of this large group of people at a university normally housing some 1,500 students, the administration began seeking alternative locations for the crowds. By February 23, though, the spontaneous revival had ended. It lasted about two weeks, with as many as 50,000 students (and others) from some 260 universities and colleges worldwide attending.[15]

The Asbury Outpouring is an example of a *revivalistic movement*—it broke out spontaneously in a particular community and among a particular group of people and then grew rapidly through word of mouth. The place and time seemed to be "ripe" for this revival, which focused on spiritual renewal and returning to a Christ-filled life. While the effects of the revival can be measured on a small scale (the number of individuals who joined up in this Outpouring), ripple effects will continue long afterward—from the kinds of students who will attend this University in years to come to the careers and choices the Gen Z participants made as a result of the revival experience.

Haitian Vodou

Vodou originated in Haiti and spread throughout the Haitian **diaspora**. The Vodou religion is extremely rich in symbolism, with art and dance playing central roles in ritual. Vodou grew out of several religions indigenous to West Africa, especially the religions of the Fon, Kongo, and Yoruba peoples. The term *vodou*, used by outsiders to describe the religion, comes from the Fon language of Dahomey (now Benin) and means "spirit" or "deity." Practitioners say that they "serve the spirits."

History of Vodou

The country of Haiti occupies the western third of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which was discovered by Europeans in 1492. In 1697, Haiti became a French colony. (The rest of Hispaniola today is the Spanish-speaking country of the Dominican Republic.)

The French colony of Haiti eventually became one of the richest colonies in the Caribbean, largely because of plantation agriculture dedicated to sugar cultivation and other extractive activities, such as the production of molasses and rum. Sugarcane cultivation is very labor intensive, and large numbers of slaves were brought from West Africa to work the plantations.

The slaves soon outnumbered the French colonists, who lived in constant fear of slave rebellions. In the late seventeenth century, the French government decreed that all slaves had to be baptized and instructed in the Catholic religion. Yet, other than the baptism ceremony itself, slaves were given little or no religious instruction because few landowners

allowed priests on their land. Over time, the slaves became vaguely aware of the most basic tenets of Catholicism, but they continued to practice their African religions.

In 1790, the feared slave revolt came to pass. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti, the first Black republic in the New World, declared its independence in 1804. The establishment of a republic formed of ex-slaves was not popular with its neighbors, and diplomatic recognition was withheld for some time. As a result, Haiti became isolated from the rest of the world. The Vatican recalled its priests in 1804 and broke off relations with Haiti; Catholic clergy did not return until 1860. It was during this period of isolation that Vodou developed. Today, Haiti is nominally a Catholic country, although many Protestant churches have been established. Yet Vodou remains strong, and a majority of professed Catholics also practice Vodou.

Vodou beliefs

Vodou is, in many ways, a West African religion. It worships many of the same deities, and Vodou rituals closely resemble West African rituals. Haitian Vodou has a pantheon of deities called *lwa*, which are similar to the *orisha* of the Yorubas (Chapter 9). Altars are constructed containing objects that are infused with spirits, and offerings and sacrifices are made to appease the *lwa* (Figure 12.2). Dance and music play major roles in Vodou ritual.

The *lwa* can be divided into several pantheons. The two most important are the Rada and the Petwo *nanchon*, or nations. The Rada *nanchon* consists of deities that would be very familiar to a Yoruba. These are African deities and are thought to be very ancient. In contrast are the Petwo *lwas*. They are aggressive and assertive, born out of the slave experience. Many first appeared during the period of isolation in the early nineteenth century. Another important group of *lwas* is those associated with death.

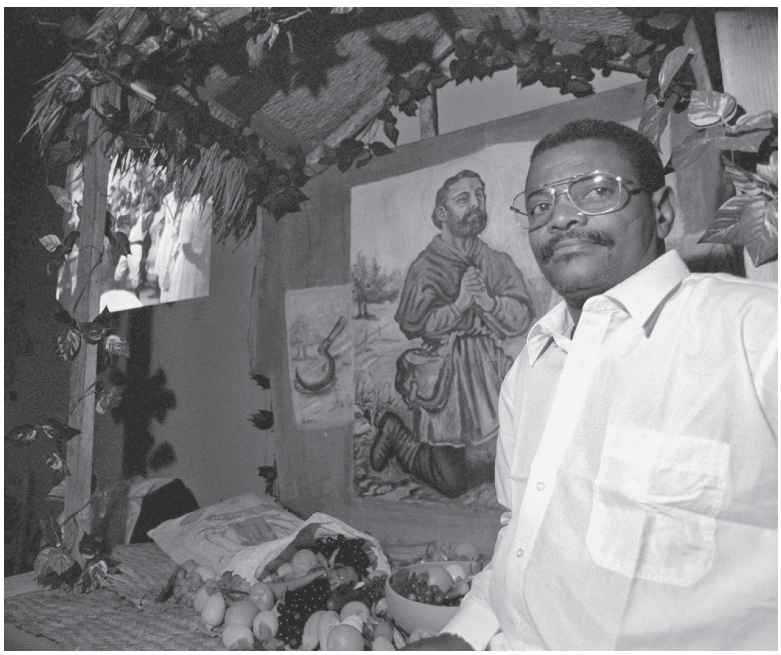

Figure 12.2 Vodou altar. This replica of a Vodou altar was set up as part of the exhibit "Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou" at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Vodou priest Sauveur St. Cyr is seen in front of a painting of the *lwa* Azaka/St. Isidore, the *lwa* of agriculture.

Source: Retained

Each deity has a particular personality, domains over which he or she rules, and particular associated symbols. These symbols include not only physical objects and artistic motifs but also particular ways of speaking and music and dance movements. Each *lwa* is also known to be partial to certain foods that are used as offerings. In general, the Rada *lwa* likes things that are "cool," such as candies and sweet drinks; the Petwo *lwa* like things that are "hot," such as strong drinks like rum and spicy foods.

An example of syncretism in Vodou is the association of particular *lwa* with Catholic saints and manifestations of the Virgin Mary. Symbolism in the chromolithographs (colored posters) used by early priests who attempted to bring Christianity to the slaves was seen as symbolic of the deities. Perhaps the oldest and most venerated of the deities is Danbala, the Rada serpent deity. His domain is rain, fecundity, and wisdom. Danbala is depicted as Saint Patrick, who is pictured on the chromolithographs with snakes at his feet. In Vodou art, Danbala is often seen with his wife, Ayida Wèdo, the rainbow serpent.

Santería

Other religious movements, similar in form and function to Vodou, developed throughout the Caribbean, Brazil, and other parts of the New World, where slaves were imported to work the large plantations. Santería developed in Cuba from a fusion of West African religions, primarily Yoruba, and Spanish Catholicism.

Slavery lasted longer in Cuba than in Haiti, and the independence of this last Spanish colony in the New World did not occur until 1898. By this time, there were a large number of freed slaves living in communities in remote mountainous areas and various mutual aid societies and social clubs in urban areas. Santería developed out of these societies and today has spread to other areas in the New World (Figure 12.3), including the United States. In urban areas in the U.S. with large Hispanic populations, such as Los Angeles, the religion is most often seen in the context of Botánicas, or stores that sell charms, herbs, and other materials used in Santería.

Figure 12.3 A Santería consultation in Havana, Cuba; Santería priestesses often wear white clothing.

Source: Wikimedia

Santería deities, called by the Yoruba name *orisha* (Chapter 9), show the same syncretism as the Haitian *lwa*. The *orisha*, known by their Yoruba names, are associated with particular saints: Ogun is Saint Peter, Obatala is Saint Mercedes, and Shango is Saint Barbara.

The name Santería was originally pejorative, used by the Spanish to note what they saw as an unusual amount of attention being paid to the Catholic saints as opposed to Jesus Christ. The proper name for the religion is *Regla de Ocha*, or Rule of the Orisha, although Santería is now used as well. The religion is also known for being secretive. Relatively little information about beliefs, rituals, and symbols is shared in public, in part because animal sacrifice has been associated with Santería. Animal sacrifice on behalf of recognized religious expression is protected in the U.S. under the First Amendment.

Cargo cults

A well-known historical example of nativistic movements is the cargo cults of New Guinea. The term cargo cult comes from the word *cargo*, which in the pidgin English spoken in New Guinea and the Melanesian islands means "trade goods." These movements began along the coast in the late nineteenth century but reached their peak during and after World War II when the U.S. military brought in large quantities of manufactured goods.

When European explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators first entered the area, they brought with them a wealth of manufactured goods that sparked the imaginations of the Native peoples and became highly desirable items. The newcomers were seen as conduits for material goods and were perceived as being very powerful. In the context of Native culture, power comes from knowledge of the supernatural. Thus, the activities of the missionaries resonated with the population, and Christianity became of interest partly to discover the ritual secrets that the missionaries used to bring material wealth (cargo) by sea from what the Natives perceived as the Land of the Dead.

Soon, however, it became clear to the local people that the key to controlling the cargo was not in Christian rituals. They believed the missionaries refused to share the magical secrets with them, and other Europeans were unwilling to share their goods with the Natives. They also resented the condescending attitude and strange appearance and behavior of the Europeans toward the Natives.

This disillusionment led to the emergence of a number of stories about the origin and control of the cargo and the power of the outsiders. The Europeans did no obvious work and engaged in a number of very strange activities. One Native explanation was that the manufactured goods must have been made in the Land of the Dead by the ancestors of the Melanesians. The Europeans, through ritual, intercepted the ships and airplanes and stole the cargo that was meant for the local people.

The solution to the problem was to discover and learn the Europeans' magic. Then, the people could rid the land of the outsiders and permit the ancestors to land the planes and bring the cargo directly to their descendants. This would also usher in a period of paradise on earth and, in some cases, the return of the ancestors.

Several cargo cults emerged over these years. They often appeared in response to a prophet who believed they had discovered the secret used by the Europeans in controlling the cargo. The European activities seen as magic rituals varied from place to place, but Natives attempted to reproduce the rituals that they witnessed first-hand. They included making marks on paper, running flags up poles, marching with sticks over their shoulders, dressing up in European-style clothes, and sitting around a table with a vase of flowers in the center. One group cleared a long strip of land in imitation of a landing strip, complete with a control tower.

As puzzling as these activities were to outsiders, in some movements, the prophet announced that the ancestors and manufactured goods would not appear until the people destroyed their own traditional sacred objects or exposed these objects to people who were not supposed to see them, especially women and uninitiated boys. In other movements, success would not happen as long as the people had adequate food, so pigs and crops were destroyed. The results were tragic.

One of the best-known of the early cargo cults was the Vailala Madness, which occurred between 1919 and 1923. It centered on divination trances. Old rituals were set aside and

many Native ritual objects were destroyed, and new rituals, containing many Christian elements and military-style activities, appeared. For example, messages from the dead could be received through flagpoles. In 1932 and 1933, another cargo cult emerged among the Buka people. They believed that steamships would arrive with cargo, and a large warehouse was built to store these manufactured goods. However, the steamship would not arrive as long as the people had food, so they destroyed their farms to get ready for the expected arrival of the cargo. *Magical thinking*, common to almost all religious traditions, led to these dire consequences.

The Ghost Dance movements of 1869 and 1890

Cultural disruption by settler colonists also set in motion Ghost Dance movements among the Northern Paiutes in 1869 and 1890. The visions of Wodziwob, or Fish Lake Joe—so-called because he lived in the Fish Lake area 90 miles southeast of Walker Lake—led to the first movement. Unique to the Fish Lake Paiutes were mourning ceremonies and cremations honoring the dead, practices also found among non-Paiute tribes to the west in California. Moreover, Northern Paiutes of Fallon, Mason Valley, and Walker Lake all performed rituals to bring back the dead.

Wodziwob's visions fit perfectly into the cultural milieu of Natives living in western Nevada and adjacent parts of California. Wodziwob's visions began in the mid-1860s when he dreamt about a dance in which men, women, and children formed a circle, facing inward, holding hands with interlocking fingers, and shuffle-stepping clockwise. Performing the dance five nights in a row fatigued some dancers, resulting in visions and new Ghost Dance songs. Wodziwob's vision also specified that if the dance should be performed properly at least 20 times a year, deceased Indians would be resurrected to live a happy life, as opposed to the destitution of the living. Deceased Anglos, however, would not be reborn. The 1869 Ghost Dance was a transformative movement attempting to reverse deprivation suffered by the Northern Paiutes and their neighbors, who suffered depopulation from diseases, land loss, starvation, and discrimination.

Not surprisingly, the Ghost Dance quickly spread to the northwest and southwest into California and parts of the Great Basin. Northern Paiute communities adopting the dance included Fish Lake, Owens Valley, Walker River, Walker Lake, and Mason Valley. Southern Paiutes, Northern Shoshones, Bannocks, and Eastern Shoshones from the Wind River Reservation were other Basin groups who adopted the dance.

Unfulfilled prophesies caused the Ghost Dance to fall into disuse several years after its inception, though it continued in modified form in some areas through the 1880s. Nevertheless, the 1869 Ghost Dance synthesized Northern Paiute beliefs in visions and circle dances associated with luring antelopes into traps during antelope drives with beliefs in prophets, prophesies, and the return of the dead. These latter traits were possibly borrowed from Sahaptian or Salishan speakers in the Plateau and Northwest Coast culture areas, where participants attempted to restore what had been lost through depopulation and deprivation.

It is noteworthy that Mormons perceived that the Ghost Dance heralded the Millennium. During the 1870s, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints used parallel beliefs in the resurrection of the dead to their advantage to convert Bannocks and Northern Shoshones at Fort Hall, as well as Eastern Shoshones. Through proxy, they also baptized deceased Indians in the belief this would accelerate the Millennium.

The story behind the 1890 Ghost Dance was recorded by ethnologist James Mooney beginning in January 1891, shortly after the massacre of several hundred Miniconjou Lakota Ghost Dancers in South Dakota. The tragedy at Wounded Knee Creek quelled the movement among the Sioux, but the Ghost Dance was still going strong among other tribes, particularly the Northern Arapahos, who were proselytizing in Oklahoma Territory when Mooney arrived and witnessed a dance at the Darlington Agency in January 1891. A year later, Mooney traveled to Mason Valley, Nevada, to interview Wovoka, the Northern Paiute whose vision started the revitalization movement that swept eastward to the Plains in 1890.

Wovoka, "The Woodcutter," also known by his Christian name, Jack Wilson, lived in Mason Valley, 40 miles northwest of Walker Lake. Mooney traveled to Mason Valley in early January 1892 to visit Wovoka, who related the great revelation he had received on January 1, 1889, during a solar eclipse. Wovoka "died" and was taken into heaven.

> Here he saw God, with all the people who had died long ago engaged in their oldtime sports and occupations, all happy and forever young. It was a pleasant land and full of game. After showing him all, God told him he must go back and tell his people they must be good and love one another, have no quarreling, and live in peace with the whites; that they must work, and not lie or steal; that they must put away all the old practices that savored of war; that if they faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world, where there would be no more death or sickness or old age. He was then given the dance which he was commanded to bring back to his people. By performing this dance at intervals, for five consecutive days each time, they would secure this happiness to themselves and hasten the event.[16]

The syncretic elements in Wovoka's revelation probably derive from his association with his father, Tavibo, a follow of Wodziwob, the 1869 Ghost Dance prophet. Wovoka received Christian instruction and was taught to read the Bible by the Wilson family, who hired him as a farmhand, and it is possible that Presbyterian, Catholic, and Mormon traits were incorporated into his Ghost Dance teachings.[17]

Mooney explained the basic doctrine of the 1890 Ghost Dance:

> The great underlying principle of the Ghost dance doctrine is that the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be reunited upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of indigenous happiness, forever free from death, disease, and misery. On this foundation each tribe has built a structure from its own mythology, and each apostle and believer has filled in the details according to his own mental capacity or ideas of happiness, with such additions as come to him from the trance.[18]

During the winter of 1889–1890, the prophecy of Wovoka spread throughout the Great Basin, diffusing north and east to the Great Plains. The dance and other Ghost Dance symbols were part of the religion, and each tribe interpreted the symbols according to its own values.[19] When Mooney quizzed Wovoka that cold, snowy January, the "prophet" emphasized that he did not invent the "ghost shirts" that were so popular among the

Sioux, that the Paiute Ghost Dance did not involve trance states as did the dances on the Plains, and that he preached reconciliation, not conquest of the Anglo-American race. Instead, Wovoka believed that all Indians must "follow the white man's road and to adopt the habits of civilization." Mooney felt that Wovoka was holding something back—downplaying the entire affair was not surprising given the Wounded Knee massacre—though he heard stories of Wovoka's powers and prophesies from others who knew him.[20]

Before leaving Nevada, Mooney was reassured by Wovoka that he never claimed to be the Son of God, though he asserted to be "a prophet who has received a divine revelation." Laden with gifts from Wovoka—including "a blanket of rabbit skins, some piñon nuts, some tail feathers of the magpie . . . and some of the sacred red paint, endowed with most miraculous powers"—as "souvenirs" for his Cheyenne and Arapaho friends at the Darlington Agency, Mooney took leave of the renowned prophet.[21]

Versions of the 1890 Ghost Dance persisted in parts of western Oklahoma well into the twentieth century among the Pawnees and Caddos and among Basin groups, including the Utes, Northern Shoshones, Bannocks, Eastern Shoshones, and Southern Paiutes. As evident by Mooney's January 1892 interview, Wovoka obviously stopped proselytizing the Ghost Dance in the wake of the Wounded Knee tragedy. Nevertheless, Wovoka held fast to his vision and received visitors until his death in 1932. He traveled throughout Indian country and survived by selling magpie and eagle feathers, red ocher like he gave Mooney, and ten-gallon Stetson hats like the one he wore. Wovoka's Indian followers believed these items had healing attributes.[22]

Besides his vision that spawned the 1890 Ghost Dance, Wovoka is famous for two other prophesies. He prophesied that his grandson would "one-day fly in the sky" and become "a captain of men." In 1944, his grandson, Vaptain Harlyn Vidovich of the Flying Tigers, was shot down by the Japanese over China. His second vision specified that an earthquake would occur following his death to prove that he had re-entered heaven. Three months after his death on September 29, 1932, an earthquake shook Mason Valley and neighboring areas, confirming to his descendants that his prophecy was fulfilled.[23]

If you wonder what a Ghost Dance looks like, pay attention to the performance of the Round Dance next time you attend an intertribal powwow. The Round Dance is derived directly from the round dances performed in the Great Basin for the Ghost Dance.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism)

Many new religious movements emerged in the United States in the early nineteenth century. It was a time of great stress and crisis for a country heading into a Civil War. The Industrial Revolution brought many changes in traditional lifestyles, including the movement of many people to cities and the subsequent breakdown of old ideas of community. The proliferation of different Christian **sects**—new branches of mainstream religion—led to *choice fatigue*, as a single dominant church was replaced by numerous options. Out of this stress grew many revitalization movements, including the Seventh Day Adventists and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

The LDS Church was founded by Joseph Smith (1805–1844), who grew up in New York, where his family were *seekers*—what we might call nondenominational Christians. Smith

was troubled by the number of Christian sects that existed and wanted to find the "true Christianity." Smith received his first vision at the age of 14. God and Jesus came to him and told him that all of the various sects were in error and that he should not join any of them.

A few years later, when Smith was 17, he had three visitations from the angel Moroni to prepare Smith as a prophet to restore the "true Christian Church." Moroni revealed to him the location of golden tablets containing additional biblical history, and Smith was able to use decoding stones buried with the tablets to translate them into what is now known as the *Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. This book did not replace the Christian Bible but rather supplemented it. Mormon was an ancient prophet who was believed to have compiled the sacred record, the source of the name *Mormons* for members of the LDS Church.

The early LDS Church was heavily persecuted, and in 1844, Smith was jailed for his destruction of an opposition printing press in Nauvoo, Illinois. While he was incarcerated, a mob attacked the jail and killed Smith and his brother, provoking a crisis in the group. However, God sent a revelation that Brigham Young would be the next leader, and Young led them to what became Salt Lake City, Utah. There, the LDS Church encountered difficulties with both Native Americans already living in the area and the U.S. government, which refused Utah recognition as a state because of the LDS practice of polygyny. Utah finally received statehood after the LDS leadership received an 1890 revelation from God that disallowed plural marriages.

In some ways, LDS beliefs are similar to those of evangelical Christianity, including the literal truthfulness of the Bible, **atonement, resurrection,** and **tithing**. However, there are also significant differences. For example, while most conservative Christians believe that salvation is based on faith alone, Mormons believe that salvation also requires good works. In Chapter 9, we discussed the concept of the Trinity for monotheistic Christianity—an indivisible single God in three manifestations. Among Mormons, the Trinity is seen as the Godhead, composed of three separate beings with different identities. Smith described God as self-made, finite, and having a material body. Jesus is "God the Second, the Redeemer," and the Holy Spirit is a Spirit Personage.

Another obvious difference is the *Book of Mormon*, a history of a group of Israelites who departed from the Middle East around 600 BCE, before the time of the Babylonian captivity, and came to North America. This included a patriarch, Lehi, and his sons, two of whom were named Nephi and Laman. Two tribes, the Nephites and Lamanites, are descended from these two sons. The two groups lived in a state of continual feuding, and eventually, the Lamanites killed off the Nephites (around 385 CE). The Book also says that after his resurrection, Jesus came to North America, where he performed miracles, delivered sermons, and selected twelve disciples from among the Nephite tribe.

The Mormons believe that these are the same doctrines that were held by the very early Christian Church. They believe that they are restoring the original church of the apostles to how it was in the first century of the Common Era.

Modern-day cultural revival in Belize

Indigenous knowledge, including medical knowledge, is embedded in language, so the erosion of information about traditional medicines is endangered by language loss, environmental degradation, and the influx of Western concepts, including attitudes towards

health, illness, and healing. Losing such knowledge lessens the opportunity to reconstruct the past and understand the present. Such is the case for the 36,500 Mayas—11 percent of the total population—living today in the subtropical rainforests of Belize, Central America, a small number compared to the estimated one to two million Mayas who lived in the Belize lowlands during the Classic Period (250–925 CE).

In December/January 2006–2007, and July 2007, biologist Erik Terdal and anthropologist Ben Kracht conducted fieldwork in San Antonio, Cayo District, Belize, a village of approximately 3,000 Mayas. Most villagers are descendants of Yucatecan-speaking refugees from the Caste War of the Yucatán (1847–1903) and a few Mopan Maya refugees from northern Guatemala. (Since the early colonial period, Belize has been a refuge for oppressed Mayas.)[24] San Antonio, nestled in the scenic, albeit rugged Maya Mountains of western Belize, was of particular interest because one of its former inhabitants, Don Elijio Panti—a renowned *H'men*, or shaman, who died in 1996 at the age of 103—allegedly was one of the last traditional healers in Belize.[25] The researchers investigated claims that Mayas in Belize were losing their knowledge of plant medicines, especially after Panti's passing, as well as the assertion that the "traditional peoples and cultures that inhabit these ecosystems are disappearing ever more rapidly than the flora and fauna."[26] These claims were made by Rosita Arvigo, an ethnobotanist and naprapath whose books proclaim that she was the only student to learn Panti's craft before his passing because he did not pass on the traditions of the H-men.[27] From their experiences in San Antonio, Kracht and Terdal learned that Arvigo's claims were unfounded (Figure 12.4).

Figure 12.4 A gathering of Mayas in San Antonio, Belize; H'men are associated with healing among the Mayas.

Source: Photo courtesy of B. Kracht

An afternoon visit with villager elder Alfonso Tzul revealed that children in 95 percent of the village households now learn Spanish and English as opposed to Mayan, which he believes is dying because English has been the *lingua franca* of the village since the 1960s. Language obsolescence suggests the loss of indigenous knowledge, but surprisingly, interactions with villagers revealed that plant lore and knowledge of medicinal plants did not end with Panti's death. For example, Panti's niece, Aurora Saqui (Chapter 6), related how Panti came to her in a dream several hours before his death, asking her to find a *sastun*, the stone of light used by H'men. Now, she is a practicing H'men in the village of Maya Centre, Stann Creek District, Belize. Panti also taught plant lore to Antonio Mai, warden of Panti

National Park. During a horseback trek into the park in January 2007, Mai identified over 30 plants around park headquarters and discussed their medicinal uses. Other villagers revealed their plant knowledge. Also tutored by Panti, Silverio Canto was teaching his son how to collect herbs in the forest. Regarded as the most powerful healer in San Antonio, Secundino Howe, a snake, or bush doctor, was also trained by Panti. Another healer taught by Panti, Don Beto Cocom of Bullet Tree Falls, has worked with Anabel Ford of the Mesoamerican Research Center, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Despite views from the outside world, the people of San Antonio have maintained traditions dating back several thousand years: the concept of *ch'ulel*, or soul stuff, the life energy force; the belief in *alush*, "little people" and deities like Itzamna, god of creation and healing, and his consort, Ix Chel, goddess of childbirth and healing; notions of sacred geography, and that prayers and offerings are strongest at sacred sites; the belief that caves, entrances to the Underworld, symbolize life, yet emit evil winds that cause sickness; the hot/cold dichotomy, which predates Galenic concepts brought by the Spaniards; planting rituals; and the presence of H'men, and other healers.

In 1981, Arvigo and her family moved to Belize to start a farm and healing center, and within two years, she began her ten-year tutelage under Panti. In 1985, Arvigo opened the Rain Forest Medicine Trail at their Ix Chel Farm, which she sold to the next-door Chaa Creek Lodge in 2003. By that time, numerous *medicinal trails*—ranging from five-star resorts to mom-and-pop operations—sprang up throughout Belize, and today, ecotourists can visit many of them. The success of Arvigo's medicinal trail and books spawned the ecotourism industry in Belize.

Although traditional medicinal beliefs and practices have continued since Indigenous times, largely unnoticed by outsiders, contemporary Maya ethnomedicine and ecotourism through the development of medicinal trails are revivals triggered by the Arvigo's books and medicinal trail. Anthropologist Ann McMullen notes that "anthropological writings [have] triggered revivals by implying that Indian cultures were extinct or that few cultural survivals existed."[28] Contrary to claims that the Mayas of Belize have lost their knowledge of plant medicines, today's handful of extant practitioners continue to pass on medical knowledge through oral traditions.

Harkin's newer revitalization movement model can be used to examine cultural revivals that are not the result of deprivation and stress. This broader, more inclusive model suggests that revitalization movements, whether they are politically or religiously motivated, occur where indigenous populations are in recovery from oppression. Whereas the older model adequately describes classic revitalization movements resulting from the stressors of settler colonialism, the newer model helps explain contemporary cultural revivals that reflect pride in tribal identity. In Belize, pride in Maya culture and medicinal plant lore is reflected by numerous medicinal trails. Ecotourism is a major part of today's Belizean economy.

New meaning in fundamentalism

The term **fundamentalism** originated in the nineteenth century and is associated with the revitalization of a mainstream religion. Initially, it was used to refer to the opponents of liberal Protestantism who were urging a return to the "fundamentals" of Christianity to guide those whom they believed had lost their way. Among these fundamentals was a belief in the inerrancy of the scriptures and a resulting millenarianism based on the Book of Revelation.

Fundamentalism then spread to other scripture-based religions, mainly Judaism and Islam. Judaism, in particular, has focused historically on debates, commentaries, and interpretations of scriptures, and differences in these interpretations led to different Jewish denominations. In Islam, however, the Qur'an is seen as the Word of God and is not treated as a historical or literary text. Therefore, debates over meanings are not seen as challenging the foundations or sanctity of Islamic script. Because of this, many Islamic and some Jewish groups question the use of the term fundamentalism to refer to non-Christian traditions. Some Islamic writers prefer the terms "absolutism" or "extremism" instead of "fundamentalism."

Over time, however, the use of the term *fundamentalism* has shifted from an emphasis on religious scriptures to religious and social movements that share certain features. It is that etic perspective that we use here.

Characteristics of fundamentalist groups

In many ways, fundamentalist groups are easier to define by what they are against than what they represent. These groups protest against and fear modernization in general and the secularization of society specifically. They see society as no longer focused on the big questions of morality and salvation. Change is now prized over continuity and tradition; an emphasis on production and commerce has replaced more traditional values; loyalty to and identification with the state has replaced loyalty to and identification with one's religious group.

The fundamentalist worldview is focused on finding certainty, clarity, and simplicity in an otherwise complex and uncertain world. They tend to see issues in terms of right and wrong and reject the idea of relativism. Because of this mindset, they generally refuse to engage in dialogue, compromise, or find common ground.

Richard Antoun describes fundamentalism

> as an orientation to the modern world, both cognitive and emotional, that focuses on protest and change and on certain consuming themes: the quest for purity, the search for authenticity, totalism and activism, the necessity for certainty (scripturalism), selective modernization, and the centering of the mythic past in the present.[29]

Totalism is a reaction to the increasing separation of religion from other domains of life. Fundamentalists believe that religion is relevant to, and should be a part of, all parts of a society. Religious texts play an important role in fundamentalist beliefs, and **scripturalism** refers to the practice of justifying beliefs and actions through the religious text, generally held to be inerrant. Another aspect of the importance of religious texts is the idea that these texts are relevant to life today, what Antoun calls **traditioning**.

Other important themes of fundamentalist groups include **millenarianism,** anticipation of Christ's second coming, an ensuing 1,000-year period of peace, and a focus on the perceived struggle between good and evil. Fundamentalist groups are characterized by activism, and Antoun points out that "Fundamentalism is inherently oppositional and minoritarian. It is the protest of those *not* in power."[30] By this, he means political and cultural power, not necessarily economic power.

Although the themes of fundamentalist groups are very similar cross-culturally, individual movements obviously have arisen in response to very different cultural and historical circumstances. The growth of Christian fundamentalism in the United States was a reaction to secular Protestant ideology, which was important in the early days of the country. A belief in secular progress and ideas such as manifest destiny served to elevate nationalism to the level of religion. In contrast, Islamic fundamentalism is largely a reaction to Western colonialism and the extent of Western cultural and economic infiltration into Islamic countries, and Jewish fundamentalism has its roots in reactions to the strong anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in eastern and central Europe.

The Iranian revolution

Islamic fundamentalism is a movement grounded in social, religious, and economic stressors that exist in many Muslim countries—since the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s, many Islamic countries have been politically marginalized globally. The colonial context of political and economic domination is also an important backdrop. In many areas of the Middle East, the borders established by European colonial powers in the early twentieth century rarely coincided with the boundaries of preexisting communities. Ethnic and regional diversities, as well as local loyalties to various tribes or religious sects, made it difficult to integrate people into one nation.

Even after Muslim countries gained independence, colonial influence remained: Many Muslim countries were ruled by a Westernized elite, and there was a plethora of mass-produced Western goods and mass media. Although the 1970s increases in oil prices brought wealth to the region, this was amassed by the elite and only served to accentuate the relative deprivation of the majority of people. For many Muslims, this cultural and economic domination by the outside was seen as a sign of God's wrath and a call to return to a strict adherence to the principles of the Qur'an. Islamic fundamentalism illustrates many of Antoun's themes described earlier, including scripturalism and traditioning.

Perhaps the best example of political activism in Islamic fundamentalism is the 1979 Iranian Revolution. This was a religious revolution against secular nationalism, led by religious leaders and using religious idioms. An example of this was the use of the myth of the Imam Husayn. The Shi'a Muslims in Iran focus not on the Prophet (like Sunni Muslims do) but instead on his descendants. According to Shi'a tradition, almost all twelve of the original **imams,** descending from the prophet Muhammad, died by violent means and at the hands of the secular government in power at the time. These stories form the backdrop for a worldview of alienation from society, and more particularly from the government, which is seen as unjust and illegitimate.

Of particular importance is the story of the third imam, Husayn, the grandson of Mohammed. Before the revolution, religious devotion centered on Husayn's role as an intercessor between humans and God. However, during the course of the revolution, a new interpretation and emphasis emerged. The story is that in the seventh century, Husayn was on a pilgrimage to Mecca when he heard that his adherents in Iraq were surrounded by an army and needed his support. He broke off his pilgrimage, one of the five required pillars of Islam, to go to them. In Iraq, he, his family, and his followers were martyred. The focus

shifted to Husayn as a revolutionary who believed that the struggle against oppression was more important than even the performance of basic Muslim worship obligations.

At the time of the revolution, Iran was a constitutional monarchy ruled by Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. While it was a strict dictatorship with censorship laws and the imprisonment of political activists, some rights and conditions in Iran had improved. The White Revolution in the 1960s had begun a series of social, economic, and political reforms that gave more freedom to women and emphasized secular over religious education. These attempts to modernize Iran involved the help of the United States, who saw Iran as a potentially stabilizing force in the region. The Shah, though, was opposed by many groups. Some disliked the Shah's autocratic rule and the corruption of the very wealthy royal family. Religious leaders saw his rule as overly secular and tied to the West, particularly to the United States.

The revolution against the Shah utilized the imagery of the story of Husayn. Demonstrators yelled, "Everywhere is Kerbala, and every day is Ashura" (Kerbala and Ashura being the place and time that Husayn was killed). The U.S. president at the time, Jimmy Carter, was identified as Yazid, the ruler of the army at Kerbala, and the Shah was seen as Shimr, the general sent by Yazid to kill Husayn. The United States was called the "Great Satan."

On December 10, 1978, the Day of Ashura—the anniversary of the day that Husayn was killed—two million demonstrators marched for hours. They carried flags of green, red, and black, symbolizing Islam, martyrdom, and Shi'a. By the end, a resolution was passed, and Ayatollah Khomeini, living in exile, was invited to become the new leader of Iran. He returned in February 1979 and formed the Islamic Republic. Islamic law was reestablished, mandated religious instruction was reinstituted, and many new social norms were instituted, including the veiling of women, a ban on alcohol and gambling, and the censoring of all media for sexual content.

Box 12.2 The veil in Islam

Many religious systems prescribe standards of behavior. This includes standards of dress and grooming. Examples are the dress codes of the Amish and the Hasidic Jews. While the details and underlying theology may differ, these rules function to identify members of the group and to display one's commitment to the group's religious practices. In Muslim countries, it is traditional for women to cover their heads, and sometimes even their entire body, in the presence of non-family males. This is seen as adherence to a level of modesty that is required by religious and social custom.

The nature of the covering varies from society to society. The most commonly worn garment is the *hijab*, a headscarf that covers the head and neck. Other forms of veiling include the *niqab* that covers the entire body except for an opening for the eyes; the *chador*, a long shawl that covers the head and body but leaves the face uncovered; and the *burqa*, a full-body veil with the eye-opening covered by mesh.

The wearing of such coverings is mandated by law in several countries, such as Saudi Arabia; in other countries, it is customary but optional.

In some communities undergoing assimilation, the *hijab* has become an important symbol not only of a religious system but of one's cultural origins and identity. In France, which maintains a strict separation between religion and the state in the education system, this became a major issue in 1989 when three teenage girls of North African descent wore headscarves to school. When asked, they refused to remove them and were subsequently expelled. This became known as the "headscarf affair" and led to attempts to outlaw the wearing of headscarves in public schools.

In 2004, France passed a law banning the wearing of all conspicuous religious symbols in French public schools. The law does not single out the *hijab,* and each school must find its own interpretation of "conspicuous religious symbols." A cross and the Star of David are usually allowed, but in one case, a student was expelled simply for wearing a long dress that came to her ankles. *Yarmulke*s (Jewish skullcaps) are frequently allowed as cultural and social symbols rather than religious symbols.

The law is controversial, and debates focus on the rights of minority groups and religious freedom in France. The *hijab* is also seen as an avoidance of assimilation by stressing one's ancestry and cultural heritage. France has experienced several acts of terrorism perpetrated by religious extremists, and anti-Muslim feelings are on the rise. For many, the *hijab* has become a symbol of the fear of the "other."

Now, the debates have moved beyond the schools. On the Mediterranean coast of France, many cities banned the *burkini*, a full-body swimsuit worn by Muslim women, in response to terrorist attacks there in 2016. City officials argued that the burkinis were associated with Islamic fundamentalism and would cause emotional distress following the attacks. In Nice, France, the human rights group Collective Against Islamophobia brought a court case saying it was discriminatory, Anti-Muslim, and unconstitutional. The court suspended the ban as no public risk was shown. Some have pointed out that full-body coverings worn by Catholic nuns are permitted on the same beaches.

Under the new religious rule, Iran has been criticized for many human rights violations, including the imprisonment and murder of critics of the regime. Although women had gained many important rights under the Shah, these have all been lost. Patrols were formed to confront women for such violations as wearing lipstick or showing their hair.

The Arab Spring

The "Arab Spring" uprisings are a recent catalyst of open resistance in Islamic countries. Beginning in Tunisia in 2011, resistance spread to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria. The term "Arab Spring" was coined by the Western media in response to the

successful uprising in Tunisia and referenced the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989, when most countries in the former Communist bloc adopted democratic political systems and a market economy in a very short time frame. The expectation that a similar thing would happen in the Middle East, with political systems collapsing in the face of popular uprisings, was misguided. As opposed to what happened in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, there was no consensus on what should replace the existing system.

Two conflicting principles were at play in the uprisings: the desire for more implementation of Islamic fundamentalism on the one hand and the belief that secularism had to be defended on the other. This has resulted in the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Instead of political reform and social justice, there has been more war and more violence.

High demand religions

Besides fundamentalist movements, many new religious movements also have connections to established religions. If the new group is still considered mainstream and differs on just a few points from the mainstream religion, it is usually referred to as a **denomination**. Examples of Christian denominations are Baptist and Lutheran; Islamic denominations would include Sunni and Shi'a. A *sect* is even more distinct from the older religion than a denomination is. Although still connected to the mainstream religion, sects are generally associated with a founder or leader and new revelations. Examples of Christian sects include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, discussed earlier. There are real challenges, however, with the term cult.

The "cult" question

Historically, a cult is a form of religious worship that includes devotion to a particular person or thing. Thus, the Catholic Church speaks of the cult of Mary. However, very few people use the term *cult* with this meaning. Although there are some neutral definitions—such as considering a cult to be a small, recently created, and spiritually innovative group—most definitions are associated with more negative imagery.

Even those who use the term *cult* with negative meanings do not agree on what a cult is. For example, evangelical Christian groups might label as a cult any religious group that accepts some, but not all, of what evangelicals accept as Christian doctrines. Thus, the LDS Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Unification Church (discussed later) would all be considered cults. However, a group such as the Wiccans does not get attention from this group because they are not a Christian-derived religion. This highlights the gate-keeping issue that often occurs when a new group splinters off. Who gets to decide who can call themselves Christian?

On the other side is the Anti-Cult Movement. Largely composed of mental health professionals, this group targets what they consider to be dangerous and authoritarian mind control ("brainwashing") and doomsday cults. They are most concerned with what they see as deceptive recruitment techniques and psychological techniques used to control members. The media also play a large part in how religious groups are perceived. When the term *cult* is employed by the media, it is most often used to refer to a small religious

group with a charismatic leader who is brainwashing his followers and is in total control of them. The group is seen as evil and usually apocalyptic.

Because of this confusion and the often negative connotations of the term, many researchers avoid the term *cult* altogether and instead view religion as a continuum from mainstream religions to denominations and sects and eventually to **high demand religions.** These are at the far end of this continuum but otherwise are no different from other religious groups and should be regarded as such. In the next section, we will focus on high demand religious groups as legitimate forms of religious expression while acknowledging the challenges and dilemmas these groups present for the larger society.

Characteristics of high demand religions

All religious groups require their members to have certain kinds of beliefs and to behave in certain ways, and all groups require some degree of conformity from their members. However, groups vary in the level of this demand and the degree of control they attempt to exert over members.

An example of a higher-end demand situation that very few would label a cult is a Roman Catholic monastery. Monks must follow a strict schedule of sleep, work, and prayer. Their diet is limited, and they often take oaths of celibacy and even silence. They must accept without question the decisions of those in authority. These are traits that are commonly associated with high demand groups.

In high demand groups, the beliefs and behaviors of group members are strictly controlled, commonly through long hours of work with little or no free time, a restricted sleep schedule, strict control of access to outside information, and the creation of a view of the outside world as unsafe and threatening. Behavior also may be controlled by public shaming, humiliation, and isolation from outside contacts. Communal living is common, and members may be given new names and identities to signify their break with their past lives and their affiliation with, and devotion to, the new group.

Some researchers claim that the endless repetition of prayers and other techniques are, in actuality, auto-hypnotic techniques. For example, a person might be taught that when faced with criticism of the group, he or she should repeat a certain phrase over and over. Another area of concern for some observers is the deceptive recruitment techniques that some groups use.

Mind control?

One of the major issues surrounding high demand religious groups is perceived mind control or *brainwashing*. A proposition of the Anti-Cult Movement is that the pressures exerted by these groups move beyond normal social pressure and constitute a unique form of influence that can be all-controlling. However, many social scientists question this assertion. How is "brainwashing" different from other forms of social influence and normal socialization? Why do we not say that people converting to mainstream groups are being brainwashed? Were we all brainwashed by our parents to accept the beliefs of our cultures and our religions?

An interesting study by Jeffrey Pfeifer looks at how we label these different areas of social influence differently. In this study, people were presented with a fictional paragraph

describing a student named Bill. They were told that Bill left college to join a Catholic seminary, to join the Marines, or to join the Moonies. Several high-demand techniques were described:

> While at the facility, Bill is not allowed very much contact with his friends or family and he notices that he is seldom left alone. He also notices that he never seems to be able to talk to the other four people who signed up for the program and that he is continually surrounded by [Moonies, Marines, Priests] who make him feel guilty if he questions any of their actions or beliefs.[31]

When asked to describe Bill's experience, those who thought Bill joined a Catholic seminary labeled it as "resocialization"; those who thought he joined the Marines frequently labeled it as "conversion." Only those subjects who thought that Bill joined the Moonies used the term "brainwashing."

Many studies have failed to support the idea of brainwashing. Several of these have focused on the issue of recruitment, with the idea that if these groups did have some way to override free will and control a person's mind, then everyone, or at least almost everyone, who attends a recruitment meeting for one of these groups should, in fact, convert. This turns out not to be the case.

However, there are characteristics that serve as early warning signs of a dangerous group. One of these is the authority claimed by the leader of the group and what that person does with this authority. An example is when leaders set up ethical rules that everyone must follow—except for the leaders themselves. This can also extend to the leadership dictating important personal details in the lives of followers, such as whom a person can marry.

Another feature of a dangerous group is when the group sees itself as being above the law or as not having a social contract with the secular state. Although some people place apocalyptic ideology on the list, this is in and of itself not necessarily a danger sign. However, when the group believes they will be soldiers in God's army during this apocalypse and begins to stockpile weapons for this battle, the issues change.

Examples of high demand religions

Recent decades have seen the development of many new religious movements, including several that could be labeled as high demand. Many of these movements are little known in the wider society, but some have come to our attention in dramatic and often tragic ways. This includes the Branch Davidians and Heaven's Gate groups in the United States.

New religions are derived from older religious traditions. In the United States, these are often Christian-based. Many of the new religions base elements of their ideology on the Book of Revelation, which describes a future apocalyptic world transformation.

Branch Davidians (Students of the Seven Seals)

The Students of the Seven Seals can be traced back to a group that broke off from the Seventh Day Adventists in the 1940s. Led by Victor Houteff, the new sect shared a number of the same beliefs as the Seventh Day Adventists, such as a belief in the imminent return of

Jesus Christ. However, Houteff taught that Christ would return only when at least a small number of Christians had sufficiently purified themselves and that he himself was God's messenger sent to conduct this necessary cleansing. The key to this was esoteric information contained in a scroll referenced in the Book of Revelation in the Christian New Testament. This biblical book describes events that will occur when Christ returns and the world as we know it ends. The referenced scroll is protected by seven seals, hence the name of the group. They are also known colloquially as Branch Davidians.

After Houteff's death, control of the group passed to his wife, who prophesied that the world would end in April 1959. When this did not occur, some people left the group, but it survived, and there was a series of new leaders. In 1981, a man named Vernon Howell joined the group as a handyman, and he married the daughter of a prominent member of the community. After a power struggle, Howell took control of the group in 1987 and changed his name to David Koresh, after the biblical King David and the Babylonian King Cyrus. By the early 1990s, the group had over 100 members.

Under David Koresh, the group came to believe that the death of Christ had provided salvation only for those who died before Christ did, that is, before 32 CE. People who had died since that time could be saved only by the actions of the current prophet, Koresh himself. The Book of Revelation says that the Lamb of God will open the seven seals and trigger the sequence that ends the world as we know it. Traditionally, Christians have made the interpretation that the Lamb of God is Jesus Christ. The Branch Davidians believed that the Lamb of God was David Koresh. After the breaking of the seals, a battle would occur in which the Branch Davidians believed they would play a major role, hence the need for weapons. After the battle, they alone would ascend to heaven to be with God.

The group's practices included many typical in high demand religious groups. They lived communally and led a highly regulated, disciplined life. Koresh exerted control over sex and marriage, leading couples to end their marriages so that the women in the group could join Koresh as his "spiritual wives," which included sexual access. Everyone else was expected to remain celibate. Members were not allowed to go to the movies or engage in competitive activities, and the lengths of women's dresses and their hairstyles were regulated. Koresh himself had veto power over all decisions. The practice that brought them to the attention of the U.S. government, however, was the gathering of a large supply of weapons.

In 1993, in Waco, Texas, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) decided to arrest Koresh for firearms violations. When ATF agents entered the compound, a firefight erupted in which six Branch Davidians and four agents died. A 51-day siege followed. Finally, federal agents fired tear gas grenades and used tanks to try to penetrate the building. Several fires had started in the compound, and Koresh and at least 75 of his followers, including 21 children, died (Figure 12.5).

Much has been written about the events of Waco, and much remains unclear. Certainly, the federal officials failed to take the Branch Davidians' religious beliefs seriously and to consider this as a factor in their strategy. Koresh apparently believed that the raid was the start of the war of Armageddon. This case points out the problems associated with the freedom of religion, especially when the group is armed and awaiting a millenarian battle. How can a society balance religious freedom against the need for order and security?

The Branch Davidian movement has survived the death of Koresh and continues today. A small chapel was erected on the site of the siege, where people still come to pray. In 2004,

Clive Doyle, the former caretaker of the site, now deceased, said in an interview:

> If it was all a deception, and yet we were convinced it was right, then how can we ever know the difference between good and evil, and right and wrong? . . . If I was misled by God, then how would I ever believe anything ever again?[32]

Figure 12.5 Branch Davidian compound in 1993; this high demand religion led to the deaths of many individuals.

Source: Wikimedia

Unification church

The members of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity are also known by the derogatory term *Moonies*, after the founder of the movement, Reverend Sun Myung Moon. When Moon was 15 years old, Jesus Christ appeared to him in a vision and gave him the responsibility of completing "the work." The Unification Church was founded in Seoul, Korea, in 1954 with the goal of uniting Christian denominations around the world and bringing unity among all major religions. Moon believed that this was necessary in preparation for the second coming of Christ. Missionaries were sent to Japan and the United States beginning in the 1950s, but the religion did not see significant development in the United States until Reverend Moon came to the country in the early 1970s.

The main beliefs of the church are contained in the text *Divine Principle*, published in 1973. The text tells of new truths or the new Principle revealed through Reverend Moon. This text explicitly says that the time for the second coming of Christ is the present and focuses on the family as the purpose of creation. Marriage is a primary symbol of Unification theology.

Figure 12.6 Mass wedding of the Unification Church; much of the theology of the Unification Church is based on marriage and the family.

Source: CORBIS-NY

The practice for which the Unification Church is best known is the large joint weddings, here

presided over by Reverend and Mrs. Moon (Figure 12.6). Some have included thousands of people, and some matched up a month or less in advance.

The Unification Church teaches that before Adam and Eve were married in Eden, Eve had an affair with the Archangel Lucifer, causing the spiritual fall of humankind. Eve later had premarital sex with Adam, which resulted in the physical fall of humankind. Taken together, these two illicit sexual acts made Adam and Eve into an imperfect family. It was this sin that let Satan take control of the world. God's plan, by which Jesus would redeem humanity and undo the harm caused by Adam and Eve, was for Jesus to form a perfect marriage. However, Jesus was killed before he could do this. Unfortunately, physical salvation is not possible because Jesus did not complete his task.

Complete salvation, both spiritual and physical, will be possible only after the arrival of the "third Adam" (Jesus is seen as the second Adam) and his subsequent perfect marriage. The third Adam is seen as the second coming of Christ—he will be the perfect man who will marry the perfect woman, and they will become the "true parents" (spiritual parents) of humankind. Although the Unification Church has never made this official claim, many members believe that Reverend Moon (now deceased) and his wife, Hak Ja Han, are the True Parents.

The Unification Church and its sects continue today. Moon's son, Hyung Jin Preston Moon, established the Rod of Iron Ministries in 2015, a more militant Unification group that uses firearms in religious rituals and espouses a pro-gun rights ideology. In early 2018, this group gained national attention when Moon sponsored a marriage rites renewal ritual in which couples were asked to bring their AR-15 rifles to the ceremony.

UFO religions

Some new religious movements have imported elements of modern technology, such as space travel and cloning, as a basis for a philosophy that, while not always seen as a religion to outsiders, clearly serves as such. Most scholars consider UFOs to be within the realm of the paranormal or supernatural, thus fitting in with our definition of religion (Chapter 1). The UFO groups describe extraterrestrial beings, or "ufonauts," in the same way that supernatural beings are described in more traditional religions. These wise, supernatural beings are often seen as spiritual beings who have come to earth to help humans in some way.

Another common religious theme is the idea of an imminent apocalypse. The world is seen as being on the verge of destruction. The "ufonauts" will somehow rescue the human race, usually preventing a nuclear war or selectively removing people from the planet to preserve the species. "Ufonauts" are often seen as having been involved in the original creation of humans or the planet.

Many of the new religious movements in the United States are based in part on Christian beliefs. Even many of the UFO religions exhibit syncretism and contain significant Judeo-Christian elements.

HEAVEN'S GATE

The Heaven's Gate movement was the last of three organizations founded by Marshall Applewhite, also known as "Do," and Bonnie Trusdale Nettles, also known as "Ti."

Passages from the Christian Gospels and from the Book of Revelation were reinterpreted as referring to UFO visitations. They saw the earth as being in the control of evil forces. However, they saw themselves as among the elite who would be saved from the evil on earth and taken to the next level.

Members of the group lived communally in a house in San Diego, California. They dressed in unisex clothing and were all celibate. Eight of them, including Applewhite, had been voluntarily castrated. This was seen as preparation for the next life, in which there would be no sexual activity and no gender identity. Members were required to separate themselves from family and friends and to reject human emotions and material possessions. Their lives focused on following a disciplined regimen referred to as the *overcoming process*, through which they could overcome human weaknesses and prepare themselves for a physical transition to the next kingdom.

The group saw humans in a dualistic way: that the human soul was a superior entity that was only temporarily housed in a physical body. The soul was seen as similar to a plant in a container, but this container could be left behind, and the soul could be replanted in another container. The Heaven's Gate members believed that extraterrestrials had planted the seeds of current human beings millions of years ago and were coming to reap the harvest of this work by taking spiritually evolved individuals to join the ranks of spaceship crews. The members believed that by committing suicide together at the right time, they would leave their containers (or bodies) behind and be replanted into another container at a level above that of human existence.

The correct time was seen as March 1997, near Easter. They believed a spaceship was hiding in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet. Twenty-one women and 18 men voluntarily committed suicide in three groups on three successive days.

RAELIANS

The Raelian Movement was founded in 1973 by French race car driver and journalist Claude Vorilhon, known as Rael to his followers. Vorilhon says that while walking in the mountains around France, he had an encounter with space aliens and was given a message about the true identity for humans. He was told that a team of extraterrestrial scientists, the Elohim, created humans in laboratories and then implanted them on Earth. In the Hebrew Bible, Elohim is translated as "God." Rael says that the word means "those who came from the sky."

Over the next five days, Vorilhon continued to meet with the extraterrestrials, who gave him new interpretations of parts of the Bible. For example, the Elohim chose Earth as a place to conduct DNA experiments, and they built laboratories for this purpose in what is now known as the Holy Land. They first created plants, then animals, and finally humans "in their own image." The humans were housed in these laboratories at first, referred to in the Bible as the Garden of Eden, but they proved to be too aggressive and were forced out.

Vorilhon was also told that prophets, who are the offspring of the Elohim and human women, have been sent in the past. These prophets included Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, and Joseph Smith. Rael, who the extraterrestrials named Vorilhon, is the last of 40 prophets sent to warn humans that we are now living in the Age of Apocalypse.

Edgar Cayce
A self-professed devout Christian and Sunday School teacher in the Presbyterian Church, Cayce (1877–1945) was a well-known prophet, medium, psychic, and faith-healer in the early part of the twentieth century. Cayce would enter a self-induced state of deep sleep in order to communicate with the "universal unconsciousness." Known as the Sleeping Prophet, his "readings" for clients on health conditions and future events contributed to the development of the New Age and holistic health movement in the U.S. In 1931, Cayce founded the Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE) in Virginia Beach, Virginia, in part to distinguish himself from being labeled a fortune-teller. This organization continues today with many thousands of members, and sponsors lectures and training in various healing techniques.

Instead of destroying themselves with nuclear weapons, humans can choose instead to change their consciousness. This change will enable humans to inherit the scientific knowledge of Elohim. Through science, four percent of humans will be able to clone themselves. After doing this, they will be able to travel through space and create life on other planets.

Rael focuses on cloning as the only hope for immortality. Annual rituals are held so that the Elohim can fly overhead and record the DNA code of the Raelians. Most members are loosely affiliated with the group and acknowledge the Elohim as their fathers. The more committed members join the Structure. The Structure works to further the two main goals of the movement: to spread Rael's message and to build an intergalactic space embassy in Jerusalem to receive the Elohim.

The Raelians have received the most attention from journalists through their organization CLONAID and their claims to have successfully achieved human cloning. However, they have been unwilling to offer any scientific proof that they have, in fact, cloned a human being, and most observers believe this to be highly unlikely.

New directions and revitalization in religion

Throughout this text, we have examined diversity in religion across time and space. Like other aspects of human social and cultural life, however, religion is dynamic and constantly changing. Considering once more the *operational definition* with which we started (Chapter 1)—belief in supernatural beings, focus on the sacred, recognition of a supernatural power, practice of rituals, a clear worldview, sense of a functioning social structure, and explanations for some of the unknowable aspects of life—what about those who say they are "spiritual but not religious"?

"Spiritual but not religious"

"Spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) is a rising form of self-identification in the United States and worldwide. Classified in general as the religiously unaffiliated, in a 2023 Gallup poll, some 33 percent of Americans said they are "*spiritual* but not religious."[33] Up from an estimated 19 percent in 2012, this is a growing designation today.[34] Some SBNRs would identify or be labeled as "Nones," those with religious beliefs but no affiliation (Chapter 9, an etic view), but in her research, theology professor Linda Mercadante found that those identifying as "spiritual but

not religious" had deep, complex relationships with religion. Coming from diverse social and religious backgrounds, these individuals seek something sacred in their lives but do not want affiliation with organized religious institutions.

There are diverse explanations for the emergence of SBNRs—among them, a generational shift, increasing focus on individual spirituality and mind-body-spirit balance, the rising politicization of religious institutions in society, the uncovering of corruption and abuse within mainstream faiths, and rapidly-changing demographics and technological advances leading individuals into new forms of community. And there is a great deal of diversity among the SBNRs. Mercadante found five general types of SBNRs:

- "*Dissenters*" are individuals who intentionally move away from organized religion; they may or may not have had bad experiences in a church, but they do not see church as a viable option.
- "*Casuals*" tend to be associated with spirituality as a form of mental and physical therapy and may be involved with things such as meditation, tai chi, reiki, yoga, etc.; seeking a sense of balance in their lives, they see spirituality as a function of a healthy life.
- "*Explorers*" are like tourists and are looking for new spiritual adventures; they see no need to establish spiritual roots and are not looking for any type of commitment, but, instead, have a kind of "wanderlust" in spiritual matters, easily *syncretizing* religious elements they find interesting and useful.
- "*Seekers*" are individuals in transition—perhaps between churches—but they seek to eventually re-establish themselves in a religious community; many have a palpable "spiritual longing" and are not rejecting affiliation as much as asking more of it.
- "*Immigrants*" tend to be those who are beginning to adapt to a new religious identity—perhaps a new congregation—and they are still unsure; they may even have been trying out a new affiliation and are not yet fully committed.[35]

Is SNBR just a catchall term for those no longer *being* religious? Does SBNR meet our criteria for religion, or is it something else? Is the emergence of SNBR proof that religion is in decline, or is it something more complex? As Mercadante notes in her study,

> The "spiritual but not religious" movement may not be simply a protest against religion but also a protest against a secular world that brackets the spirit or forces an overreliance on science to answer all problems.[36]

The development and rapid growth of designations such as SNBR, which meet all of the criteria in the operational definition we are using, instead of being a sign that religion is in decline, are actually signs of its health and endurance. Individuals continue to search for new meaning, some of which may lead to religious revitalization in traditional faith systems.

Across cultures and time, all faith systems either adapt or die. Because religion is one of the most critically important human experiences, it continues to drive our species to seek deeper and more satisfying understandings and explanations of what it means to be human.

Conclusion

Religions exist to answer questions, show us a culturally defined correct path, and make us feel safe and secure in the world we live in. Religions are specific to the cultures and circumstances in which they are found. But what happens when those conditions change, and the religion no longer meets these needs? When a new religion, more suited to the new situation, is needed, a revitalization movement is born. Revitalization movements are likely to be popular in periods of rapid social change when the current ways of doing and thinking about things are no longer satisfying. They spell out a clear path, a new path (or the return to a former one) that they say will lead people out of despair and into a better future, which will answer questions and provide meaning to life. Deprivation models best describe historical or classic revitalization movements, though other possible relations between Indigenous groups and colonial societies improve when the former is in recovery from oppression. This, in turn, can trigger modern day cultural revivals, including gaming, the invention of tradition, language revival, healing, ethnomedicine, massage therapy, and Indigenized Christianity.

Summary

Culture change through forced acculturation is inevitable, as witnessed by the last 500-plus years of European colonialism that has spawned *revitalization movements* in Indigenous cultures around the world. Participants in the newly formed religions attempt to bring back and preserve cultural lifeways and values that they feel are being threatened by outside forces. Notably, the new religions feature traits fused together from two or more cultures, a process called *syncretism*. Deprivation and stress explain classic revitalization movements, but movement from deprivation to recovery from oppression may spark a cultural revival.

Revitalization movements form as people deliberately attempt to bring about change in a society. They are initiated frequently by an individual or a small group that promises better times. A.F.C. Wallace identified six types of revitalization movements, including nativistic movements, revivalistic movements, Cargo Cults, vitalistic movements, millenarian movements, and messianic movements. The six types of revitalization movements and associated behaviors are not mutually exclusive, so a particular movement can manifest many of these patterns. For instance, Christianity features millenarian and messianic characteristics. Classic revitalization movements are exemplified by the Great Basin/Plains Ghost Dance movements, Vodou in Haiti, Santeria in Cuba, Cargo Cults in Melanesia, and Latter-day Saints in the United States. An example of modern-day cultural revival is ecotourism and medicinal trails inspired by Maya traditional medicine and H-men.

Fundamentalism is also a revitalization force in religion. The fundamentalist worldview is focused on finding certainty and simplicity in an otherwise complex and uncertain world. While the term was originally used with Christian groups, it has been expanded now to include all of the Abrahamic faiths. Recent fundamentalist movements in Islam include the Iranian Revolution and the Arab Spring.

All religious groups require some degree of conformity from their members. However, groups vary in the level of this demand and the degree of control the group attempts to

exert over members. At one end of the spectrum are *high demand groups*, in which the beliefs and behaviors of group members are strictly controlled. Sometimes, the activities of such groups become dangerous to their members and to society.

Today, religion continues to change and revitalize individuals, groups, and cultures. One of the fastest-growing self-identifications in the U.S. today is (SBNR).

Do you want to know more?

Visit the text website at routledgelearning.com/anthreligionmagicwitchcraft and find additional resources and study guides for Chapter 12.

Study questions

1. What are the core features of religious revitalization, and why do you think this process is so common across cultures?
2. Vodou and Santeria are syncretic religions. Discuss how the history of these religions affected their development.
3. What is the role of prophecy in the Ghost Dance movements? In what kinds of societies would you expect to find religious movements such as these? Why?
4. Why do high demand religions develop? Why do you think people join these religions?
5. The Islamic veil has been a controversial symbol in some societies that are not predominantly Muslim. Describe other controversial religious symbols that you know.
6. What does it mean when a person says they are "spiritual but not religious"? Why do you think this is a growing phenomenon today?

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Glossary

acculturation the process whereby a culture is modified by traits from a dominant society; oftentimes, cultures exchange traits, but acculturation becomes one-sided when forced on the subordinate group

acrostic a word that is derived from the first letter of many words

aerophones a musical instrument in which air is blown across or into some type of passageway, such as a pipe, whistle, or flute

Afrocentrism a worldview centered on those of African descent; commonly associated with the Rastafarian movement

age grade a series of consecutive statuses defined by age; age grades are commonly used across cultures as a way of organizing social groups

age set a social group that contains members of the same sex in a similar age range; age sets are sometimes used to structure social groups by age (at this point, they would be considered *age grades*)

agnosticism the idea that the existence of a god is unknowable, that it is as impossible to prove the nonexistence of the supernatural as it is to prove its existence.

agriculture intensified farming of large tracts of land utilizing various forms of technological modification; associated with the development of state societies

aleuromancy divination using flour, as in the divination practice of fortune cookies or reading flour debris left in a bowl

allopathy the model for Western medicine where diseases are treated by the use of agents producing effects different than those of the disease; often associated with the use of pharmaceutical drugs or surgery

altered states of consciousness any mental state that the individual or observer recognizes as different from a normal, everyday mental state; altered states are often associated with religious practices

analytic definition a definition that focuses on the way religion manifests itself or is expressed in a culture

ancestor a group of supernatural beings from whom one has descended; often associated with religious practices

angels spirit beings who act as mediators between God and human beings; associated with Christianity, Islam, and Judaism

animatism the belief in an impersonal supernatural power first proposed by Robert Marett; used today as a term meaning life force or power force that permeates the universe

animism a belief in spirit beings and souls coined by E.B. Tylor; first associated with the belief in dual souls, one alert during the day and another at night (associated with dreaming); often found in non-state religions

anthropological ethics professional standards of conduct and decision-making associated with fieldwork and the handling of data

anthropology the study of humanity, the study of human cultures and what it means to be human

anthropomorphic attributing human behaviors and identity to non-human entities; this is common across religions

anti-therapy ritual a ritual that is performed to bring about illness, accident, or death

apantomancy divination based on a chance meeting with an animal

apocalyptic myths a type of origin myth in which we see the destruction of the world; it can also be a series of mythic creations and destructions

apotropaic practices cultural practices meant to protect the community from evil influences

apparitions ghosts or some part of the human personality/mind/soul that can somehow exist in our physical universe after the death of its body

applied anthropology using anthropologically gained knowledge about a culture to help people within that culture; today, anthropologists increasingly work both in and outside of academic settings

arbitrary a feature of symbols, meaning the symbol is not related to the thing it refers to

archaeology the study of human material culture (artifacts) and the reconstruction of human lifeways

archetype a main character of the collective unconscious

asceticism a lifestyle in which an individual or group restricts pleasure through self-discipline and avoidance of any type of over-indulgence, including controls on food, sleep, and sexual behaviors; usually associated with a religious belief system

astrology the belief that all of the stars and planets, as well as the sun and moon, influence the destiny of people and that reading the sky can be used as a divination technique

athame a ritual knife, or ceremonial blade, associated with the practice of Wicca

atheism disbelief in or denial of the existence of a god or gods

atonement a belief that some action can be done to erase or correct previous faults or sins; for Christians, the idea that the death of Jesus Christ represented a sacrifice that reconciled humans and God

attribute god a god that rules over a defined domain; an attribute god is associated with a particular concern

avatar the incarnation or bodily manifestation of a deity or soul

axis mundi a central (imaginary) axis seen as linking the three different levels of the world, the central world containing humans and the supernatural layers above and below it; associated with sacred space

bio-cognitive approach a theoretical approach that studies religion as a product of the stimuli on the brain; considering biological influences in the study of religion; associated with various anthropologists

biological anthropology (physical anthropology) the study of human biological and evolutionary heredity; it involves the physical diversity of humans and the evolution of our species

calendrical ritual a ritual that is performed on a regular basis as part of a religious calendar; also called *periodic rituals*

cargo cult religious movement occurring among small-scale societies of Melanesia in response to cultural contact; the movement focuses on the attainment of trade goods

channeling when a person becomes a source of communication for a supernatural agent

chant a ritualized form of music that involves the repetition of a short passage of words or musical tones; it is usually sung or spoken

chaplains individuals who are certified by specific religious groups to provide spiritual guidance and support in secular institutions; often found in hospitals

chiropractic treatment treatment that involves nerve function and adjusting the spinal column and skeleton; this is used in various medical systems

cicatrization scar formation at the site of a cut or a wound; scarring is used in some cultures to indicate an individual's social status

circumcision the removal of some part of the genitalia—in males, it is often the removal of the foreskin of the penis, and in females, it can involve the removal of the clitoris or more invasive procedures; often associated with religious ritual; for females, this is often called *female circumcision*

clitoridectomy a surgical procedure characterized by the removal of the clitoris as well as parts or all of the labia minora; often associated with religious ritual

cognition a general term for processes of the human brain that include perception, learning, memory, concept formation, and problem-solving

collective conscious a set of beliefs shared by members of a social group that functions to limit the natural selfishness of individuals and promote social cooperation; proposed by Émile Durkheim

collective unconscious inborn elements of the unconscious that are manifested in dreams and myths

coming-of-age ritual a ritual that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood; also called *rites of passage*

communitas a state characterized by a sense of equality, community, and camaraderie; communitas was coined as an anthropological concept by Victor Turner and is associated with major ritual moments when there is intense social bonding in a group

contagious magic magic that is based on the Law of Contagion, utilizing things that once were in physical contact with an individual; shooting magic is a form of contagious magic; this was coined by James G. Frazer

cordophones a musical instrument with taut strings that can be plucked, strummed, hit, or sawed, such as a violin or harp

core shamanism a modern spiritual practice designed for Western audiences that draws on concepts and practices of traditional shamanism but is usually used as a method for improving an individual's life; a feature of many neo-shamanic movements

covenant a binding agreement or contract between parties; in religions, covenants are often believed to exist between humans and deities

creation myths a type of origin myth that explains how the world as we know it began; these are generally the most sacred of religious narratives and address questions of identity

creator god a god that is responsible for the creation of the physical earth and the plants and animals that live upon it

crisis ritual a ritual that is performed as needed, usually associated with a crisis; also called *situational rituals*

cross a symbol associated with Christianity and other religions and religious practices

cross-cultural approach the examination of beliefs and values in different cultures so we can better understand the similarities and differences that are part of the human condition; integral to the anthropological perspective

cult commonly used to describe a small spiritual or religious group focused on a particular deity or venerated object; alternatively, it can be used pejoratively to refer to a group that is rather small and considered to hold threatening or strange beliefs

cultural anthropology the anthropological study of contemporary human societies and their cultures

cultural appropriation when an individual or group adopts a cultural practice, artifact, or belief that originates in another culture as if it were their own; these practices and artifacts are out of context and this practice can be offensive to originating cultures

cultural brokerage the anthropologist's role as a researcher/intermediary learning about another culture in order to share and explain it through the emic and etic perspectives; a form of cultural translation

cultural relativism attempting to analyze and understand cultures other than one's own from an emic perspective and without judging them in terms of one's own culture; anthropologists do suspend cultural relativism if there are human rights violations

culture human beliefs and behaviors of a society that are learned, transmitted from one generation to the next, and shared by a group of people; culture is a blueprint for behavior

culture areas a geographical area within which societies tend to share many cultural traits

culture shock a period of unease and difficulty adapting to a new culture when the anthropologist may experience anxiety and depression while interacting with members of other cultures; this is usually a temporary stage

cursing ritual an anti-therapy ritual that involves reciting a curse to bring about illness and even death

demons spirit beings that are usually considered to be malevolent

denomination a religious group that differs only slightly from the mainstream religion; usually, there are minor differences in the characteristics of denominations, while *sects* may have significant foundational differences

diagnosis determining the cause of illness

diaspora a cultural/ethnic population that is removed (or spread) from its point of origin; this is frequently caused by some type of enforced movement or stress

disease the explanatory model of Western medicine that pertains to medical malfunctioning of the body

dispensationalism a theory that history is divided into distinct sacred ages (or phases) in which the Christian God has distinct relationships with (his) Creation; developed by Englishman John Nelson Darby and part of Christian fundamentalism

displacement the ability to use symbols to refer to things and activities that are remote (in time or space) from the user

divination supernatural techniques for obtaining information about things unknown, including events that will occur in the future; there is a wide range of divination techniques across cultures

divination ritual a ritual that is performed to discern cause or find more information; a type of *technological ritual*

diviner a religious specialist who uses various techniques to discern or predict information

doctrine of signatures belief that physical structures found in nature, such as the shape of a plant, are indicative (or *signatures*) of their potential use in healing

dowsing method of divination whereby water and other underground resources are located by use of a forked stick or divining rod

earth diver myth a type of origin myth in which the deity sends an emissary to go down to get mud or earth for creation

effigy a roughly made material symbol representing a person; effigies are used across religions

emergence myth these are a type of origin myth that explains creation as taking place within or under the earth and evolving over a series of actions that lead to a species or group emerging onto the earth's surface

emic perspective the study of a society through the eyes of the people being studied; also called the "native point of view"

enculturation what we learn about the beliefs, practices, and values of our own culture from interaction and observation

endocannibalism when a group consumes a portion of the remains of their own group members; this is a ritualistic practice usually associated with preserving an enduring connection with the deceased

entoptic phenomena visual effects that have their origin in physical changes within the eye itself; entoptic phenomena are associated with some Upper Paleolithic art

essentialist definition a definition that looks at the essential nature of religion, emphasizing the domain of the extra-ordinary

ethnocentrism using one's own culture as the basis for interpreting and judging other cultures

ethnographic present speaking or writing about cultures in the present tense at the time they were first studied, although what is being described may no longer exist

ethnography the descriptive study of contemporary human societies; this is associated with fieldwork in cultural anthropology

ethos the values, beliefs, and ideals of a group or culture; a culture's character

etic perspective the point of view of the scientist; the scientific perspective

Eucharist the Christian ritual recreating the Last Supper of Christ; it is considered a holy sacrament in some Christian denominations

evolutionary approach a theoretical approach that focuses on questions of when and how religion began and how it developed across time; associated with Sir Edward Tylor, Robert Marett, and Sir James G. Frazer

existential communitas a period of intense social bonding provoked by a significant unplanned event, such as the death of a leader or a national tragedy; this is one of three types of communitas proposed by Victor Turner

explanatory models models used by individuals within a culture to explain what is happening to them, especially during sickness episodes

faith healing prayers and gestures to elicit divine or spiritual intervention for healing; common across different medical systems

fasting abstaining from eating (and sometimes drinking) over a period of time; fasting can involve abstention from all food or drink or only particular food types

fetish a small stone carving representing iconic symbols of the Zuni Pueblo; they are frequently carvings of animals

fieldwork anthropological research sites; fieldwork allows for the collection of primary first-hand data

folklore the study of folktales, myths, and legends of world cultures

folktales stories that occur within a fictional world, contain supernatural elements, and frequently have a moral; they may or may not be religious

foraging/foraging bands a form of subsistence in which small communities live by hunting, fishing, and/or gathering wild plant foods

functional approach a theoretical approach that sees religion as having a function or specific role in society; associated with Émile Durkheim, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, and Bronislaw Malinowski

functional definition (of religion) a definition that is based on the role that religion plays in a society

fundamentalism a religious movement characterized by a return to fundamental principles, usually including a resistance to modernization and an emphasis on certainty through a literal interpretation of scriptures

ghost the soul of an individual after death that remains in the vicinity of the living; often associated with illness or misfortune

glossolalia a form of speech that mimics spoken language and is believed to be the supernatural speaking through an individual; also called "speaking in tongues"

god an individual supernatural being with a distinctive name, personality, and control or influence over a major aspect of nature (such as rain or fertility) that encompasses the life of an entire community or a major segment of the community

graphology divination through handwriting analysis

guardian spirit a spirit helper who has a specific relationship with an individual and serves as their ally

hallucinogens a group of psychoactive substances that provoke altered states of consciousness; these may be natural substances or chemically-produced ones

haruspication divination by the examination of entrails of sacrificed animals

haunting related to apparitions, hauntings are replays of the past, analogous to a recording locked in time

healer any individual who is involved in curing illness or injury; this term is applied to medical practitioners, priests, and shamans

hedonism a lifestyle that is focused on pleasure and self-gratification; many religions have injunctions either in favor or against these practices

herbalism the study of traditional Indigenous plant remedies; also associated with ethnobotany

heresy actions and beliefs that are denominated as crimes against God by mainstream religious traditions

hero myths a common theme found in myths worldwide centered around the hero's journey, or monomyth

high demand religion a religious group in which much is demanded of members in terms of strict adherence to rules for thought and behavior

holism the study of human societies as systematic sums of their parts, as integrated wholes; a fundamental characteristic of the anthropological approach

holistic medicine a whole-body approach to healing based on symptomology, nutrition, and psychological wellness; involving body, mind, spirit, and emotions

homeopathic magic magic that is based on the Law of Similarity; also called *imitative magic*

homeopathic medicine treating with minute doses of drugs that produce symptoms similar to that of the disease; "like treats like"

horticulture/horticultural villages societies in which subsistence involves the cultivation of domesticated plants without the use of fertilizers, plows, irrigation, and other agricultural technologies; simple farming, using a hoe or dibble as the major tool

human universals characteristics that are found in all human societies; a scientific approach focuses on identifying human universals

icon a religious work of art, usually a painting, that is used as a vehicle for prayer; when praying with icons, the believer focuses intently on seeing what the image communicates about faith

ideological communitas social bonding that develops in the separation of a group of individuals from a larger group; this is one of three types of communitas proposed by Victor Turner

ideological rituals a ritual that delineates codes of proper behavior, promotes community solidarity, articulates the community's worldview, and assists the community in managing crises

idiophones a musical instrument that is struck, shaken, or rubbed, such as a rattle or bell

illness illness pertains to culturally constructed models in which individuals interpret sickness through the logic of their culture

image magic a form of homeopathic magic in which an image represents a living person or animal, which can be killed or injured by doing things to the image

imago mundi a representation of the image of the universe, or cosmos

imam an Islamic religious leader who guides and leads prayer in a mosque

imitative magic magic that is based on the Law of Similarity; also called *homeopathic magic*

increase rite a type of ritual whose purpose is to aid in the survival and reproduction of a totemic plant or animal

incubi male demon spirits who have sex with human women while they sleep, resulting in the birth of demons, witches, and deformed children

Indigenous knowledge local conceptions of the universe and everyday wisdom used for survival

infibulation form of female genital cutting (or surgery), which includes the excision of the clitoris, the labia minora, and most of the labia majora

Inquisitions inquiries established by the Roman Catholic church to formally investigate crimes against the faith; these were first convened in the thirteenth century

inspirational divination a type of divination that involves a spiritual experience, such as direct contact with a supernatural being through an altered state of consciousness

intentional communities groups of people who voluntarily choose to share in a more focused, committed life with like-minded individuals and separated from the wider society

interpretive approach a theoretical approach that sees cultural systems as carriers of meaning; religion is a cluster of symbols that conveys a culture's ideas, values, and ways of life; proposed by Clifford Geertz

jinn spirit beings made from fire who often take the form of a human or animal and have different personalities; associated with Islam

karma when a person's actions have consequences in their lifetime; associated with Hinduism

key informants specific individuals or families who serve as liaisons or culture brokers with the wider community; collaborators

kiva a ceremonial chamber, aboveground or underground, that is found among Pueblo societies in the American Southwest

labyrinth a path, most often in the form of a circle, which invites those who walk it to travel slowly and contemplatively, as if on a pilgrimage; a spiritual tool

Law of Contagion proposed by Sir James G. Frazer, this is the belief that things that were once in contact continue to be in contact and affect each other even after the physical connection is severed

Law of Similarity proposed by Sir James G. Frazer, this is the belief that things that are alike in form and/or manner are connected and exert a force on each other

Law of Sympathy proposed by Sir James G. Frazer, this is the belief that all magic functions on the apparent association or agreement between things.

legends a traditional story about past events that is considered to be true; it usually contains an element of reality, either in the protagonist, place, or event; legends may or may not contain supernatural elements, and they may or may not be considered sacred

liminality the state of ambiguity and marginality that accompanies the transition phase of a ritual; most often associated with a rite-of-passage ritual

linguistic anthropology the anthropological study of language; involves the study of linguistic diversity and evolution

magic rituals by which an individual can compel the supernatural to behave in certain ways

mana a Polynesian term for an impersonal supernatural force; it may be found in the landscape, objects, or persons

Marianism a religious tradition that emphasizes devotion to the Virgin Mary; associated with some expressions of Roman Catholicism

Marxist approach a theoretical approach that sees religion as a construction by those in power, designed to divert people's attention from the miseries of their lives; a way of getting people to accept the inequalities of capitalist culture; associated with Karl Marx

medical anthropology the cross-cultural study of medical systems

medium a practitioner who intentionally communicates with the supernatural to find information

membranophones a musical instrument that incorporates a taut membrane or skin, such as a drum

miasma European folk belief that illness is born by noxious, or bad air, especially cool night air or air blowing across swamps and dumps

mihrab a niche within the mosque that is in alignment with the direction of Mecca; the Muslim congregation faces the direction of the mihrab during prayers, thus facing Mecca

millenarianism belief in an imminent future religious return to a "golden age"; in Christianity, it is associated with anticipating the return of Jesus Christ and a 1,000-year period of peace

Millerism a historical apocalyptic movement in Christianity that predicted the imminent return of Christ; this formed the beginnings of the Adventist movement in the U.S.

modernity a philosophical movement based on ideas of rationality, objectivity, reason, and science as a means of gaining knowledge, truth, and progress

monomyth a theme common to many myths that tell of the adventures of a cultural hero

monotheistic belief in a single god; monotheism is associated with state societies

multivocal a quality meaning that symbols have many possible meanings; associated with Victor Turner

mummification a technique used to preserve a dead body by using various techniques, such as drying and the use of preservatives

mystery religion a religion whose beliefs, practices, and true nature are known only to those who have been initiated into the religion

myth a sacred story that provides the basis for religious beliefs and practices; myths store enduring social messages for cultures

naturalistic medical models disease is caused by impersonal, systemic systems; good health is achieved through a balance of *insensate* agents, e.g., hot/cold, yin/yang

necromancy divination through contact with ancestors or the dead

neo-paganism a movement of pre-Christian religious traditions revived and practiced in contemporary times; one of the best-known of the neo-pagan religions is the Wiccan religion

neoshamanism a modern spiritual practice found in Western societies that draws on some concepts and practices of traditional shamanism but is usually used as a method for improving an individual's life

Nones individuals who have religious beliefs but are unaffiliated with any congregation or group; associated with religion in the U.S.

noninspirational divination forms of divination performed without the direct involvement of supernatural beings

normative communitas social bonding associated with the regular periodic routine of a group to define membership; this is one of three types of communitas proposed by Victor Turner

occasional ritual a ritual that is performed when a particular need arises

occult practices and beliefs that are associated with the mystical, magical, or satanic/demonic aspects of a faith tradition

offering economic exchanges designed to influence the supernatural

omen a fortuitous happening or condition that provides information; omens are often "read" or probed for information

omniscient a state of being all-knowing

oneiromancy divination by the interpretation of dreams

operational definition a definition in which we define our terms so that they are observable and measurable and, therefore, can be studied in a traditional way; a working definition

oracle a specific device that is used for divination; frequently associated with mediumship, in which a priest or priestess communicates with or channels a supernatural deity

ordeals a test (trial) by divination that is performed on the body of the accused person to determine guilt or innocence

orientation association structure the part of the brain that enables us to distinguish ourselves from the world around us and to perceive spatial orientation

origin myths cultural stories (myths) that explain the origins or foundations of many natural and social processes in our world; there are various types of origin myths, including creation myths

ornithomancy divination based on the path or form of a flight of birds

osteopathy manipulation of the skeleton and muscles; this is part of many medical approaches to healing

otiose god a god who is too remote and too uninterested in human activities to participate in the activities and fate of humans

out-of-body experience a phenomenon that occurs when part of the mind, soul, or spirit splits off and leaves the body

pagan originally used to describe Christians who worshipped other gods, today it primarily refers to those who have religious beliefs that are not part of the mainstream faith traditions in a society

palmistry divination by reading the lines in the palm of a hand

pantheon the collective of all gods and goddesses in a polytheistic religious system

parapsychology the study of psychic or *psi* phenomena

participant observation a research method whereby the anthropologist lives within a community and participates in the lives of the people being studied while at the same time making objective observations

pastoralism/pastoral nomads a mode of subsistence in which societies herd domesticated animals; pastoral societies are usually dependent on agricultural societies for vegetable foods

pentacle a five-pointed star

pentagram a five-sided figure that can be used as a religious symbol; it has served as a symbol across different cultures, including different faith traditions

periodic ritual a ritual that is performed on a regular basis as part of a religious calendar; also called *calendrical rituals*

personalistic medical models a belief in which disease is caused by a *sensate* agent, such as a deity, ghost, ancestor, malevolent spirit, or a human witch or sorcerer
phrenology divination through the study of the shape and structure of the head
pilgrimage a prescribed journey to a sacred place or a sequence of sacred places at which rituals are performed
placebo effect placebo is Latin for "I will please" and refers to a treatment that appears real but is designed to have no therapeutic benefit.
polytheistic belief in multiple gods; often associated with complex societies
possession an altered state of consciousness that is interpreted as a deity taking control of a person's body
postmodernism a theoretical movement that emphasizes subjectivity over objectivity, reflexivity (or awareness that the anthropologist's presence affects the data collected), and the belief that all knowledge is a human construction that scholars must seek to deconstruct
power displays magical feats, usually performed by shamans, to demonstrate their power and authority
prescriptive ritual rituals that are required to be performed according to the religious beliefs of the group
presentiments feelings that a person experiences that suggest a specific (or possible) outcome; these are often "read" or probed for information
priest a full-time religious specialist associated with formal religious institutions within a society; usually associated with complex, food-producing societies
prognosis expected outcomes based on the prescribed course of treatment
prophecy divination through the communication with a prophet
prophet a religious specialist who communicates to their community on behalf of the deities; often an intermediary between a community and a deity
proselytizing faith a religion that seeks converts; typically associated today with Christianity and Islam
protective ritual a ritual that is performed at the start of, or during, a dangerous activity to protect the participants or the community against disaster; a type of *technological ritual*
psychosocial approach a theoretical approach concerned with the relationship between culture and personality and the connection between the society and the individual
Purgatory a place in the afterlife where souls go to spend a period of time being purified so that they can enter Heaven; associated with Roman Catholicism
Ramadan the ninth month of the Islamic calendar that marks the period when Allah/God provided the Qur'an to Mohammed
rapport friendship and trust with members of the host community
reincarnation when an eternal soul can be born again and again in a series of different bodies; associated with Hinduism
reincorporation the final stage of a rite of passage in which the individual is reintroduced to the community in their new status
relic a venerated item that has been in contact with the body of a sacred or holy person and is itself now considered sacred because of that connection (contagious magic)
religion a set of cultural beliefs and practices that usually include some or all of a basic set of characteristics related to beliefs about the supernatural, ritual practices, a specific worldview, and group identity
religious ritual a ritual that involves the manipulation of religious symbols
resurrection re-birth after death; a common belief across religious faiths

revitalization movement a movement that forms in a deliberate attempt to preserve traditional lifeways in a society

revitalization ritual a ritual that is associated with a revitalization movement intended to bring about social change

rites of intensification a ritual whose purpose is to influence nature in the quest for food; a type of *technological ritual*

rites of passage a ritual that occurs when an individual changes status, serving to legitimate the new status and imprint it on the community's collective memory

ritual a patterned, recurring sequence of events that is public and involves a sacred, spiritual aspect

sacred an attitude wherein the subject or object is set apart from the normal, everyday world and is entitled to reverence and respect by a specific group or community

sacrifice a gift designed to influence the supernatural in which something living is killed

scapulamancy a divination technique in which a dried scapula, or shoulder blade, is placed in a fire, and the pattern of cracks and burns are interpreted

scripturalism the practice of justifying beliefs and actions by reference to the religious text

secondary burial when bones and remains are reburied after the initial burial ceremony; this is practiced across cultures

sect new branch of a mainstream religion that develops when a smaller group separates itself from the larger one; this is commonly caused by theological or political differences within groups

separation the first phase of a rite of passage in which an individual is removed from his or her previous social status

shaman a part-time religious specialist who receives their power directly from the spirit world and acquires status and efficacy through personal communication with the supernatural

shooting magic a form of *contagious magic* in which a sorcerer, ghost, or malevolent being magically injects a victim with poison; sometimes, shooting magic involves *image magic*, in which an image of the victim is shot with poison

shrine a constructed place regarded as holy because of its association with a supernatural being

situational ritual a ritual that is performed as needed, usually associated with a crisis; may also be called *crisis rituals*

sky burial a funeral practice in which the body is left exposed to be consumed by animals, usually vultures; this is associated with Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet and parts of China

small-scale describes relatively small communities that practice foraging, herding, or technologically simple horticulture

social charter a myth or written account of any kind that establishes the proper organization and rules of behavior of a society

social rite of intensification a type of *ideological ritual* that functions to reinforce the belief system and values of the society

socialization formal, deliberate, and direct training a person (usually a child) receives to become a functioning member of their culture

society the configuration of people in a geographic area; this word is commonly used interchangeably with the word *culture*

sorcery defined variously, but traditionally used to define any intentional manipulation of physical objects for the intent of harm; today, increasingly, it is seen as intentional manipulation of power through physical objects with the intent to change something or someone

soul a noncorporeal spiritual component of an individual that survives, at least for a period of time, after death; most frequently associated only with humans

soul loss when a person's soul is separated from their body; considered a symptom of disease

spell magical words that are spoken to create a change or effect; depending on the culture, these can be unvarying and passed down across generations or variable

spirit/spirits a supernatural entity generally less powerful than gods, usually more localized, and they frequently involve collections of nonindividualized supernatural beings without specific names and identities

spirit possession an altered state of consciousness that is interpreted as a spirit taking control of a human body; this can be deliberately induced through ritual or the consequence of an illness

spiritual but not religious (SBNR) a means of self-identification in which the individual sees the pursuit of spirituality as valuable and yet beyond the confines of organized religion; sometimes called "spiritual but not affiliated" (SBNA)

status a social position that is defined in terms of appropriate behavior, rights, obligations, and its relationship to other statuses

stigmata bodily wounds or pain considered by Christians to be visible signs of participation in the suffering of Christ; stigmatics are religious visionaries and mystics who experience the development of Christ's wounds in/on their own bodies

subincision form of genital cutting in which the underside of the penis is cut and the urethra slit open; this is a practice in several cultures

subsistence the survival strategies used to procure food from the environment; subsistence practices are often connected with religious beliefs and practices

succubae female demons who have sex with human men while they sleep, resulting in the damnation of men's souls

supernatural entities of actions that transcend the natural world of cause-and-effect; most religious systems are associated with supernatural elements

superstitions simple behaviors based on magical thinking that are thought to bring about simple results; these may or may not be embedded in religious systems

supreme god a god that is positioned with authority over the pantheon of gods

swastika a symbol formed by two lines crossing at right angles with their ends bent at right angles in a clockwise or counterclockwise position; used as a religious symbol in various belief systems

symbol a shared understanding of the meaning of certain words, attributes, or objects; something that stands for something else with no natural connection necessary—it is arbitrary

sympathetic system the arousal system of the brain that may be stimulated during altered states of consciousness

syncretism the blending of beliefs and values from two or more cultures; most religions in complex societies include syncretic elements and beliefs

tabu objects and persons that are supernaturally prohibited; it may also refer to certain behaviors that would bring about negative consequences

tasseography divination through the reading of tea leaves

technological ritual a ritual that attempts to influence or control nature, especially in those situations that affect human activities and well-being

therapy ritual a ritual whose function is to cure and heal

therianthropes beings that are part-human and part-animal; often associated with the practice of shamanism

tithing the giving or taking of a tithe, a tenth of one's income or agricultural produce, usually in support of a religious institution

totalism the belief that religion is relevant to, and should be a part of, all parts of a society

totem a symbol or emblem that stands for a social unit; totems can be both religious and secular

totemism a religious system that assigns different plant and animal species to specific social groups and postulates a relationship between the species and the group formed during the period of first creation

traditioning the idea that religious texts are relevant to life today

transition the second phase of the rite of passage during which a person is in a liminal state and is in the process of being moved from one to another status

transmigration the re-birth of an individual in another living body, person, or animal; this is associated with various religious traditions, including Buddhism and Hinduism

transmogrification a process in which an individual is transformed into a different being, usually a supernatural one; frequently associated with shamanism

trepanation a surgical procedure in which a hole is chiseled in the skull to release evil spirits; this was practiced for medical and religious reasons

trickster a god or deity who gives humans valued gifts or skills, usually by accident or trickery; a deity found across cultures

unitary state an altered state of consciousness in which the individual experiences a feeling of becoming unified (or one) with the supernatural

urban legends contemporary legends that tend to be transmitted via tabloids or the Internet; like other legends, they may contain elements of truth, but they are embellished

urbanization the development of permanent agricultural villages into larger urban centers with dense populations due to nearby food resources that were both predictable and abundant

vampire a creature considered simultaneously living and dead and believed to cause harm and mischief to living peoples

vision quest a ritual in which an individual seeks to interact directly with a spirit or deity; this is often accompanied by an altered state of consciousness

Wiccan *rede* similar to the "Golden Rule," the Wiccan *rede* is a founding statement of Wiccan moral principles; it appears in both a Short and Long form

witchcraft defined variously, but traditionally represents a voluntary or involuntary intent for harm that may involve the use of physical actions, formulas, or spells; in the past, this was often directed towards those least able to defend themselves; more contemporary uses of the term also involve positive intent, such as the case with Wicca

wizardry a term that includes the concepts of both witchcraft and sorcery; first proposed by anthropologists J. Middleton and E. Winter

worldview the way in which a society perceives and interprets its reality; a culture's (or group's) worldview is intimately connected with its religious beliefs

zombies soulless creatures who wander the earth; in Haitian Vodou they are seen as soulless slave laborers

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